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John Calvin on providence : the locus classicus in context

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JOHN CALVIN ON PROVIDENCE: THE *LOCUS CLASSICUS* IN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

John Calvin on Providence: The *Locus Classicus* in Context

Recent scholarship on Calvin on divine providence has largely ignored the significance of the final location of *Inst.* 1.16-18 (Calvin's *locus classicus* on divine providence) in the 1559 *Institutes*.

This study seeks not only to redress that shortcoming but also to demonstrate that scholarly criticism directed at the concept of God in Calvin's treatment of divine providence is due primarily to a neglect of this significance. To achieve this, careful consideration is given (1) to Calvin's other providence-related writings and their relationship to and influence upon the final location of the *locus classicus* in the 1559 *Institutes*; (2) to the context within which the *locus classicus* is finally located; (3) and to the relationship between divine providence and inter-related themes, not least Calvin's concept of God the Creator, found within that context.

It will be evident that Calvin was clearly keen not only to eschew any affinity between his God-concept and that of the philosophers, but also those who claim a monotheism similar to that of the Christian Scriptures. In response to the former, Calvin insists upon the Scriptural concept of God as both infinite (*contra* "imaginative" idolatry) and spiritual (*contra* "concrete" idolatry) in nature. In response to the latter, though there may be similarities between their concepts of providence and the God of providence, ultimately, they are different because they are not Christocentric nor Trinitarian in essence.

This study concludes with an examination of an example of a misreading of Calvin's God-concept in this respect. It will be evident that Karl Barth, like so many others, misread Calvin's God-concept largely because he did not give careful consideration to the final location of providence within Calvin's *schema* in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*.

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I owe a special debt to the Board and Principal of the London Theological Seminary, my *alma mater*, for not only providing my wife and I with housing during our stay in London, but also for access to the excellent resources on Calvin in their library. I am personally gratified that with the establishment of The John Owen Centre for Theological Study in the Seminary, these resources will now be available to a wider circle of research students.

I am also grateful to many individuals who made our stay in London such an enjoyable and memorable one.

Above all, I must thank my wife for her unfailing and sacrificial support throughout this period. To her, who has borne with more than one could reasonably ask, this dissertation is lovingly dedicated.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers.</i> Eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson.
CC	<i>Calvin's Commentaries (New Testament).</i> Edited by D W Torrance and T F Torrance.
CD	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics.</i> Translation edited by G W Bromiley and T F Torrance.
CO	<i>Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia.</i> Edited by G Baum, E Cunitz, E Ruess, <i>et. al.</i>
CTS	<i>Calvin's Commentaries.</i> The Calvin Translation Society.
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> (1559). Battles Edition.
<i>Inst. (1536)</i>	<i>Calvin's 1536 Institution of the Christian Religion</i> (1536), Tr. Ford Lewis Battles.
LW	<i>Luther's Works.</i> Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan.
NPNF	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.</i> Ed. Philip Schaff.
OS	<i>Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta.</i> Edited by P Barth And W Niesel.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROLEGOMENA

I. CALVIN, CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY AND PROVIDENCE

The subject of divine providence featured prominently in the theology of all the major Reformers. Zwingli and Calvin have left us in no doubt as to the importance of divine providence in their thought with their seminal works, *De providentia* and Chapters 16-18 of Book 1 of the definitive edition (1559) of the *Institutes* respectively. Recent interest in their respective views of the subject has served to confirm that importance.¹ While, admittedly, Luther did not produce any systematic treatment of the subject, a cursory examination of his lectures on Genesis or his sermons on the Gospel of John will indicate the significance it has in his theology.² Indeed, providence and its related themes form an important part of his reply to Erasmus' *De libero arbitrio* in 1525.³ Gordon Rupp observes that the outstanding impression one receives from Luther's letters is this reliance and waiting upon the providence of a living God and that, for Luther, God is not only always at hand but is also at work behind all human history and sustaining all things by his will.⁴ It would seem, therefore, that providence was a subject close to the hearts of the Reformers.

In fact, it was their particular contribution to the doctrine of providence

¹ For Zwingli, see, for example, W P Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), especially 80-107; Gottfried W Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1981), especially, 121-141, 168-172. For Calvin, see, for example, Susan E Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1991); Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1977), especially, 126-145.

² See *LW*, Volumes 1-7 and 22-24.

³ See Luther's *De servo arbitrio*, *LW*, Volume 33. Gordon Rupp has rightly suggested that the three major themes in Luther's reply were Free Will, Providence and Predestination. See Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), 274-285. Cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 105-115.

⁴ Rupp, *ibid*, 279.

which has led Karl Barth to surmise that there was a kind of "re-birth" of the Christian belief in providence during the Reformation.⁵ In a similar vein, when discussing creation and providence, Brunner opines that the "Biblical view of Creation comes into its own again with the Reformers, especially with Calvin".⁶ Delineating the differences between the Stoic idea of providence and that of the Bible, he maintains that while there seems to be "echoes of the very language of Chrysippus or Zeno" in Zwingli and Calvin, there is, in reality, a great gulf between them.⁷ Even Paul Tillich, no confessed admirer of orthodox theology, admits that the Reformers accepted what he deems to be the only adequate understanding of preservation or providence which was earlier expounded by Augustine.⁸

The above commendation, however, is qualified. In his short historical survey of the Christian belief in providence, Barth finds the Reformers guilty of not asserting or, for that matter, even asking what is the Christian meaning and character of the doctrine of providence. He went as far as to say, "Even in Calvin (*Instit.*, I, 16-18) we seek in vain for a single pointer in this direction."⁹ Barth proceeds to show that what lies at the heart of the Reformers' defective exposition of providence is their defective concept of the God of providence. He indicates that there was no decisive concept of the fatherliness of God grounded upon a christological basis in their exposition of the God of providence. The Christian belief in providence, he maintains, is wholly based upon "the revelation of God in Jesus Christ".¹⁰ It is the belief "that Christ is the image in which God has shown us not merely His

⁵ Barth writes: "And it is no accident that the Reformation with its rediscovery of the all-sufficiency of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the true divine sonship in Him of the sinful man who may cling to the grace of God and this alone, self-evidently carried with it in all its great representatives, Calvin no less than Zwingli and Zwingli no less than Luther, a kind of re-birth of the Christian belief in providence." See Barth, *CD III/3*, 14.

⁶ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics, Volume II*. Translated by Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960), 37.

⁷ Brunner, *ibid*, 156.

⁸ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (London: Nisbet & Co, Ltd, 1953), 291.

⁹ Barth, *CD III/3*, 30.

¹⁰ Barth, *ibid*, 30.

heart, namely, His love addressed to us in Him, but also His hand and feet, namely, His external works in the sphere of creation."¹¹ Contrasting Calvin and the Reformers with the *Heidelberg Catechism*, he writes:

We recall Qu. 26-28 of the Heidelberg Catechism with their repeated underlining of the decisive concept of the fatherliness of God and their express christological explanation of this concept. And what important consequences it would have had if the dogmaticians had taken seriously what is written under Qu. 50..., namely, that Christ has gone up to heaven to show Himself there as the Head of the Christian Church "by whom the Father rules all things"! But to the best of my knowledge these are isolated texts in the 16th and 17th centuries. The orthodox Lutheran and Reformed teachers are rather at one in teaching the divine lordship over all occurrence both as a whole and in detail without attempting to say what is the meaning and purpose of this lordship. They understand it as the act of a superior and absolutely omniscient, omnipotent and omnioperative being whose nature and work do of course display such moral qualities as wisdom, righteousness and goodness, etc. But this is all... It does not seem to have occurred to whole generations of Protestant theologians to ask what this lordship has to do with Jesus Christ, and the knowledge and confession of this lordship, and readiness to subject oneself to it, with faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹²

Barth blames the Reformers' defective God-concept on their adoption of

¹¹ Barth, *ibid*, 30.

¹² Barth, *ibid*, 30-31. Note Barth's title for Section 48 which emphasises his criticism of the Reformers' concept of the God of providence: "The doctrine of providence deals with the history of created being as such, in the sense that in every respect and in its whole span this proceeds under the fatherly care of God the Creator, whose will is done and is to be seen in His election of grace, and therefore in the history of the covenant between Himself and man, and therefore in Jesus Christ." *Ibid*, 3. Similarly, the title for Section 49: "God fulfills his fatherly lordship over His creature by preserving, accompanying and ruling the whole course of its earthly existence. He does this as His mercy is revealed and active in the creaturely sphere in Jesus Christ, and the lordship of His Son is thus manifested to it." See, *ibid*, 58.

"natural theology" or "naturalism".¹³ It is not surprising, therefore, that the God of providence presented by Calvin and the Reformers and later Protestantism "really amounts to no more than what Seneca and Cicero could say in other words."¹⁴ Referring to their failure to work out the connection between belief in providence and belief in Christ, he notes that,

Only occasionally and from afar, if at all, had they seen the problem of natural theology and the necessity of a radical application to all theology of their recognition of the free grace of God in Christ.¹⁵

Likewise, Brunner also objects to the Reformers' idea of providence because it is not a "purely Christian statement".¹⁶ He concedes that the Biblical idea of providence had certain non-Christian parallels, for instance, Platonism and Stoicism. But while it is true the Reformers' conception of providence differed from the Stoics at various points, it was no less Stoic. "Zwingli," he says, "accepts the Stoic *necessitas*, Calvin rejects it in theory, but introduces it again without calling it by its right name." Brunner traces this, as Barth did, to their God-concept. Calvin's conception of Omnipotence, he adds, is not that of the Bible but of speculation.¹⁷ In his estimation, the God-concept presented by Zwingli in *De Providentia* is nothing more nor less than the neo-Platonist idea of God.¹⁸ Indeed, that is precisely the Reformers'

¹³ Barth, *ibid*, 32.

¹⁴ Barth, *ibid*, 32.

¹⁵ Barth, *ibid*, 32. In this same section, Barth also adds: "The total impression is that there was a naive belief that in this matter [of providence] there could be agreement with all schools (except in detail, and apart from the Epicureans, Deists and Atheists). There was no perception of the fact that a concept of God was used, and a corresponding concept of providence developed, which in its essential features could be filled out in a way very far from Christian."

¹⁶ Brunner, *op cit*, 173. Brunner continues, "And in point of fact this is why we must object to the Idea of Providence not only of Zwingli, but also of Calvin, as well, of course, as of the younger Luther."

¹⁷ Brunner, *ibid*, 174.

¹⁸ Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics, Volume 1* (London: Lutherworth Press, 1949), 296, 321ff. While he does not consider Calvin's concept of God as similar he,

problem: their concept of providence is too deeply infected with natural theology and metaphysical speculation.¹⁹

Of the three Reformers, it would seem that it is Calvin who has proved to be the most difficult to pin down in terms of the God-concept he employed in his exposition of divine providence. This is largely because, unlike Luther and Zwingli, Calvin's relationship with classical philosophy is less clear-cut.²⁰ The general impression Luther himself gives is one of unqualified suspicion of philosophy.²¹ Paul Althaus notes that "Luther is, as a matter of principle, distrustful of and doubtful about the use of philosophical concepts and arguments in discussing theological questions."²² Zwingli, on

nevertheless, deems Calvin to be less critical of Augustine's neo-Platonism because of Calvin's strong tendency to lean on Augustine. See, *ibid*, 131.

¹⁹ Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 173. Note the following earlier, and similar, comment: "This is the way to teach the doctrine of Providence in accordance with revelation, instead of in accordance with philosophy and metaphysics. Only thus can we make a statement which is really Christian, instead of being a "foreign body" of natural theology in the midst of Christian belief." See, *ibid*, 171.

²⁰ Partee concludes thus of Calvin's relationship with classical philosophy: "Calvin may be less enthusiastic about philosophy than Erasmus, Zwingli, and Melancthon, but he is also less hostile than Luther and Colet." See his *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, 146-147.

²¹ LW 25, 361-362: "Indeed I for my part believe that I owe to the Lord this duty of speaking out against philosophy and of persuading men to heed Holy Scripture... [But] I have been worn out by these studies for many years now, and having experienced and heard many things over and over again, I have come to see that it is the study of vanity and perdition. Therefore I warn you all as earnestly as I can that you finish these studies quickly and let it be your only concern not to establish and defend them but treat them as we do when we learn worthless skills to destroy them and study errors to refute them... Thus the apostle is right in Col 2:8 when he speaks against philosophy... Clearly if the apostle had wanted any philosophy to be understood as useful and good, he would not have condemned it so absolutely." However, note the qualification below (footnote 22).

²² Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, tr. Robert C Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 4 (see Note 1). This conclusion, however, should be balanced by more recent studies which have shown that Luther's suspicion of philosophy was not as unqualified as Althaus, for that matter, as Luther himself sometimes made it out to be. For example, Janz has demonstrated very ably that though Luther's critique of Thomas Aquinas seems to be nothing short of a complete condemnation of the latter, that critique was at least partially balanced by laudatory comments. See Denis R Janz, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1989). Similarly, Andersen has argued cogently for a more balanced approach to Luther's assessment of the place of reason and its relation to faith than the generally accepted observation that Luther is a fideist. See David R Andersen, *Martin Luther's Understanding of Reason and Its Relation to Faith: A Reexamination in Light of the Epistemological, Logical, and Christological Issues* (unpublished PhD dissertation, submitted to Coventry University, 1998). I am indebted to Professor Paul Helm for drawing my attention to this dissertation.

the other hand, was not averse to philosophy generally. Stephens, in defence of Zwingli's exposition of providence, has cautioned against giving too much prominence to the concept of God presented in *De Providentia* and isolating it from Zwingli's other works. But even he concedes that the discussion of God in *De Providentia* is more philosophical than Biblical.²³ Bromiley concurs with Stephens.²⁴

It is true that Calvin frequently criticised philosophers.²⁵ But he was not averse to adopting, for example, Aristotelian categories without question.²⁶ He even condemned as superstitious those who would not borrow anything from heathen authors including philosophers.²⁷ He cites Plato, Cicero and the Stoics with approval whenever he deemed them to be saying what is true.²⁸ Most important of all, he had a special affinity for

²³ Stephens, *op cit*, 80-97. More recently, Paul Helm has shown that Zwingli, in *De Providentia*, "exemplifies the case of an *a priori* theologian who attempts to deduce the Christian metaphysic about the nature of God... from a doctrine of God as the Supreme being that he has gained not by induction from Scripture but from a philosophical conglomerate extracted from Plato, Pythagoras, and others." Paul Helm, "Calvin (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence", *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), 404.

²⁴ "It is true that Zwingli uses concepts and arguments which he had found in classical philosophy, but it is also true that the God to whom he applies them is the living Trinitarian God of the Bible, and that he derives all his faith from belief in that God and the acceptance of his revelation and work." See G W Bromiley, *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 243.

²⁵ See, for instance, *Inst.* 1.5.11-12 (63-66), 1.10.3 - 1.11.1 (98-100), 1.15.6-8 (192-196). On Colossians 2:8, Calvin (unlike Luther) was more cautious: "As many have mistakenly imagined that Paul here condemns philosophy, we must define what he means by the word. In my opinion, he means everything that men contrive of themselves when wishing to be wise in their own understanding... For the difficulty is, not rejecting those inventions of men which have nothing to commend them, but in rejecting those that captivate men's minds by a false idea of wisdom." See *Comm.* on Col. 2:8, CC, 329.

²⁶ See, for instance, *Inst.* 13.14.21; cf. *Inst.* 3.14.17; also CC, on Eph. 1:5-8, 126-128. More recently, A N S Lane has shown how Calvin had made "a larger than usual use of Aristotle" in his *Bondage and Liberation of the Will*. See *John Calvin: The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, Edited by A N S Lane, Translated by G I Davies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), xxv.

²⁷ "From this passage we may gather that it is superstitious to refuse to make any use of secular authors. For since all truth is of God, if any ungodly man has said anything true, we should not reject it, for it also has come from God." *Comm.* on Titus 1:12, CC, 363-364. Compare the following: "If we ought to form such an opinion about agriculture and mechanical arts, what shall we think of the learned and exalted sciences, such as Medicine, Jurisprudence, Astronomy, Geometry, Logic, and such like? Shall we not much more consider them to have proceeded from God?" *Comm.* on Isa. 28:29, CTS, 306.

²⁸ Partee, *op cit*, 105-125.

Augustine who was himself deeply influenced by Platonism and Neoplatonism.²⁹ So, despite his denial that his doctrine of providence is not the Stoic idea,³⁰ the tantalising question remains as to whether Calvin was consciously or unconsciously influenced by philosophical ideas, for instance, via Augustine.³¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, Calvin's thought on providence has been the subject of close scrutiny for those who have been concerned about the influence of classical philosophy upon him.³²

It should be noted that the above criticism of Barth and Brunner has not gone unchallenged. Contrary to Barth, Niesel believes that Calvin's explication of God's providential care is focused "upon the redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ".³³ He further claims, in the context of providence, that

²⁹ Battles notes that, "Throughout the *Institutes* Calvin's self-confessed debt to Augustine is constantly apparent." See his *Introduction* to his translation of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, Ivii. Calvin's dependence upon Augustine is best exemplified by the evidence supplied by L. Smits, *Saint Augustine dans l'oeuvre de Jean Calvin* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1957-1958).

³⁰ Commenting on his own doctrine of providence, Calvin wrote: "Those who wish to cast odium upon this doctrine defame it as the Stoics' dogma of fate. This charge was once hurled at Augustine... Indeed, we are falsely and maliciously charged with this very dogma. We do not, like the Stoics, contrive a necessity out of the perpetual connection and related series of causes, which is contained in nature; but we make God the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limits of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed." *Inst.* 1.16.8 (207).

³¹ A good example of how tantalising the question is may be found in Reardon's conclusion in his examination of Calvin on providence. On the one hand he admits that Calvin "was inspired by the biblical belief in God's action". He confesses that "Calvin, in spite of certain similarities with the Stoic view of Providence, was moved by a different spirit and directed by another insight." And yet, he cannot but concede that this "insight may be described as Neo-Platonic, inasmuch as it insisted, probably via Augustine, on an absolute distinction between Providence and fate. It may be called simply Platonic too, for it had a moral concern like that of the *Timaeus*, the *Republic* and the *Laws*." *Op cit*, 533.

³² Apart from Partee (*Calvin and Classical Philosophy*) and Reardon ("Calvin and Providence: The Development of an Insight"), see, for instance, S. Mark Heim, "The Powers of God: Calvin and Late Medieval Thought", *Andover Newton Quarterly* 19 (1979):156-166; Charles Trinkaus, "Renaissance Problems in Calvin's Theology" in W. Peery, ed. *Studies in Renaissance* (New York: Renaissance Society of America, 1954, 59-90; David C. Steinmetz, "Calvin and the Absolute Power of God", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 18 (1988):65-79.

³³ Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Tr. Harold Knight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 71. In support, Niesel refers to "just the chapter headings of I, 17" which, unfortunately, does not explain what he means precisely since they make no mention of the redemptive work of Christ in relation to providence. Niesel's case is not helped by his producing the caveat that "in this connection it becomes clear that Calvin's theology does not proceed by successive

"throughout his work Calvin praises the power and the goodness of the triune God who has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ".³⁴ This latter claim by Niesel of Calvin's emphasis on the Triune God in providence has been supported by Osterhaven who wrote:

Calvin insists that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in the works of creation, providence, and salvation. The Son and the Holy Spirit are active with the Father in all God's external works.³⁵

Unfortunately, both scholars do not substantiate their claim nor expand upon it.³⁶

More recently, Partee has observed that Calvin "states quite clearly that his view of providence is not Stoic because his doctrine of God differs from theirs."³⁷ He goes so far as to suggest that the philosophers' failure, according to Calvin, is due to "their ignorance of *God's nature as Triune* and his creation of the world and the devastating effects of sin".³⁸ And because of these their view of providence cannot but be seriously defective. Unfortunately, while Partee draws our attention to the centrality of the concept of God for Calvin's view of providence and has gone further than others to highlight what that concept is, viz., the Triune God, he fails to elaborate further. He merely states it as a matter of fact without actually giving any supporting evidence for believing that Calvin posited a Trinitarian

thoughts, as though the recognition of a Saviour God were inferred from the recognition of a Creator God", especially when the sections of the *Institutes* (1.16.2; 1.16.4; 1.17.1) he cites do not support his case. The most one can say of these sections which he cites, with regards to Christ's relationship with providence, is (in Niesel's own words), "By Christ Himself are we taught that God sustains and governs all things."

³⁴ Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Tr. Harold Knight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 71.

³⁵ M Eugene Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 166.

³⁶ Barth rightly notes: "But unfortunately I have not found this assertion supported in the very slightest by the passages which Niesel quotes." Barth, *CD III/3*, 30.

³⁷ Partee, *op cit*, 124-125.

³⁸ Partee, *ibid*, 42. [Italics for emphasis, mine.]

concept of God in his exposition of providence.

Schreiner has devoted a short section in *The Theater of His Glory* to the related themes of the concept of God and providence in Calvin.³⁹ She observes that the argument to which Calvin returned most frequently for the providence of God was based on the unchangeable nature of God's attributes.⁴⁰ Among the most important attributes highlighted by Calvin were the power of God and his immutability.⁴¹ Schreiner maintains that crucial to Calvin's concept of God's attributes in relation to providence is his insistence upon the inseparability of those very attributes. Indeed, it was by this means that Calvin was able to assure his readers that God's providence is reliable.⁴² However, her focus did not permit her space to discuss what that concept of God was. It would seem, therefore, that the question of the particular God-concept employed by Calvin in his exposition of divine providence remains unanswered or if answered, unsatisfactorily so.

What is clear from the foregoing discussion is that both critics and supporters of Calvin are agreed that central to his doctrine of providence is the concept of God. They all recognise that what controls Calvin's particular concept of providence is his concept of God. Where disagreement arises is whether this concept of God is a Biblical idea or an adoption or adaptation of a philosophical idea. The purpose of this study is to provide, to some extent, the basis upon which an answer may be arrived at.

II. PREDESTINATION AND PROVIDENCE IN THE 1559 *INSTITUTES*

In on-going discussions of Calvin on providence, an aspect which seems to have escaped the notice of scholars on both sides of the debate is the significance of the final location of Calvin's exposition on providence in

³⁹ See, Chapter 1 and, especially the section headed, "Calvin's arguments for the providence of God", 32-35.

⁴⁰ Schreiner, *ibid*, 33.

⁴¹ Schreiner, *ibid*, 34-35.

⁴² Schreiner, *ibid*, 34.

Book 1, chapters 16-18 of the 1559 edition of his *Institutes*. It is a well-known fact that Calvin's discussion of both predestination and providence was moved about in the different editions of his *Institutes*. In the 1536 edition he discussed providence under the first part of the Apostles' Creed (i.e., "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth"), and postponed his discussion of predestination to the fourth part of the same Creed (i.e., "I believe the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, eternal life").⁴³ This order was, however, changed in all the editions of the *Institutes* between 1539 and 1554.⁴⁴ In them, Calvin brought together both these doctrines under his discussion of soteriology.⁴⁵ But in the definitive edition of 1559 Calvin "rent asunder what he had joined together" and set providence in the context of the knowledge of God the Creator in Book 1, while keeping predestination in the context of his discussion on receiving the grace of Christ in Book 3.

That Calvin felt that the respective locations of predestination and providence were where they fitted into his final *schema* is made absolutely clear in his address to the reader of the 1559 *Institutes*. Speaking of his own diligence to constantly revise his *magnum opus* he said he was not fully satisfied with the order until the final edition.⁴⁶ That this order or arrangement

⁴³ *Inst.* (1536), 66f. and 78f. respectively.

⁴⁴ See attached appendices A and B to this study which show the chapter divisions of the various editions of the *Institutes* from 1536-1559. Appendix A is extracted from the "Synopsis" provided in CO I, li. Appendix B is adapted from Battles, "Calculus Fidei", in *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor* (Kampen: Uitgeursmaatschappij, J H Kok B.V., 1978), 87. A more detailed discussion of the relevance of these will be undertaken in Chapter Two of this study.

⁴⁵ Apart from Reardon, *op cit*, see also E A Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: W B Eerdmans, 1994), 222f; Partee, *op cit*, esp. 134-136; Richard A Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1986), esp. 17-24. It should be noted that in all these editions, Calvin set predestination before providence; the same order is, incidentally, found in *The Eternal Predestination of God* (1552). This order has led to the suggestion that, in Calvin's thought, providence is conditioned by and serves predestination [see François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, Tr. Philip Mairet (Glasgow: Collins, 1976), 267; and Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 23]. Barth seems to have demurred from a similar conclusion: "That predestination should not only be subordinate to providence but superior to it was apparently not what Calvin intended, although in the second draft of the *Institutio* (1539...) it is noteworthy that it is at least given the precedence over it..." See Barth, *CD II/2*, 46.

⁴⁶ He wrote: "Not only did I attempt this in the second edition, but each time the work has

referred in part to the final separation of predestination and providence is confirmed by what he wrote, concerning the final location of predestination within the 1559 *Institutes*:

Here it would be out of place to raise the question of God's secret predestination because our present subject is not what can happen or not, but what man's nature was like.⁴⁷

Significantly, the above statement appears just before Calvin begins his exposition of providence, indicating, of course, a departure from his previous editions of his *Institutes* where he had kept the two doctrines together. It would seem, therefore, that Calvin clearly intended this separation.

This raises the question as to why Calvin finally separated the two doctrines and, thereby, moved away from the order that he himself had maintained. Indeed, by doing so, he was also departing from the order which had been maintained by theologians like Thomas Aquinas⁴⁸ and Zwingli⁴⁹ before him and, to a lesser extent, Theodore Beza⁵⁰ after him, who all

been reprinted since then, it has been enriched with some additions. Although I did not regret the labour spent, I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth." See, "John Calvin to the Reader", *Inst.*, (3). He further added in the same address: "For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents". See, *Inst.*, (4).

⁴⁷ *Inst.* 1.15.8 (195).

⁴⁸ This is evident from Aquinas' arrangement of his *Summa Theologica* where he discusses, under the doctrine of God, providence (*ST* I, Question 22) prior to predestination (*ST* I, Question 23). Of the relationship between the two doctrines, Aquinas wrote: "And so predestination, as regards its objects, is one part of providence." See Thomas Aquinas, *God and Creation*, translated and with an introduction by William P Baumgarth and Richard J Regan (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1994), 198.

⁴⁹ Locher has observed that "Zwingli is able to say that 'providence is, so to speak, the mother of predestination'". Locher, *op cit*, 124. "Zwingli had adopted the close connection of providence and predestination favoured by Aquinas", writes Robert Letham in "Theodore Beza: A Reassessment", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40: 28. Cf. Stephens, *op cit*, 97.

⁵⁰ Muller has observed that while Beza does not mention predestination in his discussion of providence in his *Confessio christianae fidei* (1558), the juxtaposition of providence and predestination in his *Quaestionum et responsionum christianarum libellus* (1570) suggests a similarity with Calvin's 1539 *Institutes* rather than the 1559 edition. Despite this, Muller insists that "Beza draws no connection between these doctrines... Nor does he explicitly

treated predestination in the context of the doctrine of God as a special application of the doctrine of divine providence.⁵¹

According to Karl Barth, the final location of predestination within Calvin's soteriology was the result of Calvin's need for a more comprehensive consideration of the question of the systematic significance of the decree. It also indicates that for Calvin "the doctrine of election" is "in some degree the consummation of that of reconciliation, introducing it not in the middle or at the beginning, but as the ultimate and decisive word which sheds additional light upon all that has gone before."⁵² Barth goes on to argue that in the light of the similarity of placement of predestination in the catechism of 1537 and the *Confessio Gallicana* (1559), it could be seen that Calvin intended predestination to be the focal point of his soteriology.⁵³

This same conclusion has been arrived at by other scholars, though expressed in different ways. Richard Muller suggests:

Herein we detect the reason for Calvin's ultimate separation of the doctrine of predestination and providence. In the order of *loci* of the scholastic systems, both of these doctrines were conceived as the decrees of God similar in form but distinct in purpose, the former special, the latter general. The decree of providential care does not have a primarily soteriological function, while the decree of predestination has as its intention the salvation of the elect. Under the impact of his reassessment of the problem of saving knowledge, Calvin altered the structure of doctrine in the last edition of his

define predestination as *pars providentiae*." Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 83-85.

⁵¹ Timothy George, *op cit*, 232. One contemporary of Calvin who may have been an exception to the rule is Peter Martyr Vermigli. Frank James has shown how Vermigli's matured doctrine of predestination is distinctively non-Thomistic in that nowhere in his formal discussion does Vermigli describe predestination as *pars providentiae*. But as James also notes, while there are important parallels in their mature formulations of the doctrine of predestination, there are noteworthy theological differences. See Frank A James III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 67-69 and 251-255.

⁵² Barth, *CD II/2*, 85.

⁵³ Barth, *CD II/2*, 86-88.

*Institutes...*⁵⁴

He goes on to add that,

The solidification of this placement of doctrine in 1559... may be seen as a centralization of predestination in a physical sense so that like the doctrines of God and providence in Book I and the doctrine of Christ in Book II of the *Institutes*, it can provide an explanation in terms of the divine sovereignty and grace for all that precedes and follows it.⁵⁵

Others have taken this explanation of the final location of predestination a step further. They believe that because Calvin located predestination within his soteriology and, therefore, within the knowledge of God the Redeemer, it implies that Calvin was concerned to give a Christological emphasis to the doctrine of predestination. Wendel, for example, writes:

Just as the doctrine of providence, placed at the conclusion of the doctrine of God [the Creator], might be said to complete the latter as the keystone finishes the arch, so also does the doctrine of predestination complete and illuminate the whole account of Redemption.⁵⁶

He then deduces that Calvin

...connected predestination with the Christ and his work, in order to show more clearly that it is in Christ that election takes place.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Muller, *op cit*, 19.

⁵⁵ Muller, *op cit*, 23.

⁵⁶ Wendel, *op cit*, 268.

⁵⁷ Wendel, *ibid*, 268.

Similarly, Paul Jacobs, when commenting on the correlation between Calvin's doctrines of providence and predestination, concludes:

That the doctrine of predestination does not appear (which is in conformity with the place of election in the economy of salvation) before the doctrine of creation, this follows from the fact that it cannot be properly considered except from a Christocentric point of view.⁵⁸

What the foregoing discussion clearly suggests is that scholarly interest in the final separation of providence and predestination in Calvin's thought has concentrated basically upon the significance of the location of predestination within the knowledge of God the Redeemer. As far as I am aware, no serious attempt has been made to explain the parallel question of the final location of providence within the knowledge of God the Creator.⁵⁹ This is nothing short of surprising given the fact that it was providence that was moved from its location within soteriology in the 1539-1554 editions, and not predestination. As has been noted earlier, Calvin had placed predestination under ecclesiology in the 1536 edition. But from the 1539 edition onwards he seems to have had no difficulty with the location of predestination within soteriology. He understood it to belong rightly under that head and kept it there in the definitive edition. It was the placing of providence within the *Institutes* which troubled him. Wendel has observed

⁵⁸ Quoted in Wendel, *ibid*, 268, as Note 115. Similarly, Reardon concludes: "In the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin treated Providence in the first part, while leaving his discussion of predestination until the section dealing with Christ. He surely made this arrangement because of his growing appreciation of the truth that one is predestined only in Christ." See Reardon, *op cit*, 533.

⁵⁹ Reardon has suggested: "His [Calvin's] final arrangement, on the other hand, had the further advantage of removing to some distance from his ever-hardening position on predestination the more ample and consoling doctrine of Divine Providence". Reardon, *op cit*, 533. But Reardon at no point elaborates how that might be the case. Similarly, Wendel does not support how providence may be seen as the keystone which finishes the arch, *op cit*, 268. In any case, Wendel's emphasis was the location of predestination and not providence. Similarly, while Barth concedes, "We must count it highly in Calvin's favour that methodologically at least he broke with this [i.e., Thomistic] tradition, treating the doctrine of providence (*Instit.* I, 16-18) in conjunction with that of creation, and the doctrine of predestination (III, 21-24) as the climax of that of the communication of the grace of God manifested and active in Jesus Christ," he sees this separation as favouring Calvin's doctrine of predestination rather than providence. See Barth, *CD* II/2, 46.

that Calvin seems to have become aware, soon after the 1539 edition, that "he had not put his exposition of divine Providence in the place appropriate to it".⁶⁰ In the 1543 edition, he actually added a new passage on divine providence to his development of the theme of creation, thus suggesting that, to his mind, providence could appropriately be placed under creation.⁶¹ By 1545, he had located providence within creation in *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva*. And yet that same location was not confirmed in the *Institutes* until the definitive edition. Thus it would seem that what concerned Calvin in the definitive edition was not so much the location of predestination but the location of providence.⁶²

This is not to minimise the importance of the discussion of predestination in Book 3 of the *Institutes*. Rather, my purpose is to highlight a discrepancy in recent studies on Calvin especially with regards to the relative value of predestination and providence.⁶³ If, as is already evident, it was providence that was moved and not so much predestination in the definitive edition of the *Institutes*, then, the former ought to have received scholarly attention rather than the latter. Instead the reverse has been true.

⁶⁰ Wendel, *op cit*, 177.

⁶¹ The passage reads: "Whenever we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let it also come into our minds that it lies in his hand and in his power to dispose of everything he has made, and that we are his children, whom he has taken into his charge to feed and to govern; so that we may await every good thing from him, and have a sure hope that he will never allow us to lack those things that are necessary to our salvation, and that our hope may depend upon nothing else; and that whatever we desire, we ask it of him; and that, whatever good things we have, we ascribe them to him with thanksgiving; that, being moved by such great liberality as he shows us, we may be brought to love and honour him with all our hearts." This re-appears, almost *verbatim*, in the last paragraph of *Inst.* 1.14.22 of the definitive edition.

⁶² Muller writes, "Barth's argument serves to underline the point that the 1559 *Institutes* does not represent a movement of predestination out of the doctrine of God but a clarification of the place given to predestination already in 1539 and 1554, effected chiefly by the removal of providence to the doctrine of God." And yet, at no point did Muller explain the significance of this removal of providence in the 1559 *Institutes*. See Muller, *op cit*, 23.

⁶³ Paul Helm has similarly observed that "...apart from Professor Schreiner's work (viz., *The Theater of His Glory*), while considerable scholarly effort has been expended on the question of where predestination fits into Calvin's overall theological system, much less interest has been shown in the parallel question about providence. This is surprising because it can be argued that Calvin's handling of providence affords more than a clue to his estimate of predestination." See his "Calvin, (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence" in *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 388.

This study hopes to redress that imbalance to a certain extent and is offered in the belief that the final location of providence in the 1559 *Institutes* is significant for an understanding of Calvin on providence and, not least, for the God-concept he employed in his discussion of divine providence. After all if it was providence that was moved and not predestination, then this movement must, in the estimation of Calvin, be of considerable significance. Based upon this assumption that Calvin's final placement of divine providence within Book 1 of the definitive edition of the *Institutes* is of profound significance for a proper and careful reading of Calvin on divine providence, it is to be expected that the primary emphasis of this study will be given to a detailed examination of Calvin's treatment of it within the 1559 *Institutes*, and especially in Book 1. Of course, the historical development of the doctrine within Calvin's thought cannot be entirely ignored and this shall be dealt with as and when it is deemed appropriate. That notwithstanding, the fact that Calvin should finally locate divine providence where he did is, in itself, sufficient reason to concentrate primarily on Book 1 of the 1559 edition.

This study will continue with a chapter (Chapter Two) devoted to a discussion of the possible reason or reasons for the final location of providence within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. Recent studies have suggested that Calvin's engagements with his opponents have contributed significantly to the development of his thought on providence. Could it be that these controversies influenced the final location of his discussion on divine providence in the 1559 *Institutes*? Chapter Two will seek to assess that observation while highlighting a not unrelated aspect of the 1559 *Institutes* which has a bearing on the matter but, unfortunately, has been neglected in studies on Calvin. It is that Calvin did not intend his discussion on providence to be treated in isolation; rather, he saw it as an integral part of his envisaged *schema* for Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. As such, all treatments of Calvin on providence must take into serious consideration the whole context of Book 1 and his envisaged *schema* for it.

Chapter Three will provide the necessary data for the above suggestion that Calvin intended providence to be treated as an integral part of his envisaged *schema* for Book 1. It will be evident that, time and again,

Calvin endeavoured to keep together several interrelated themes in Book 1, not least, the *duplex cognitio* and especially the *duplex cognitio Dei* and divine providence. The aim is to further demonstrate not only that Calvin's placement of his discussion on providence in Book 1 is intentional, but that it was his concern to integrate that discussion into the primary object of Book 1, namely, his treatment of the knowledge of God the Creator. For Scripture, as for Calvin, the God of creation is still the God of providence. God's active involvement in his creation did not cease with the creative act. Rather his overruling, governing and sustaining activity continues till the present time.

Chapter Four will be given over to a discussion of Calvin's delineation of God the Creator, as Scripture has represented him, from all false gods in Book 1. It will be seen that Calvin views all concepts of God or, for that matter, all concepts of creation and providence which are not in accordance with Scripture as idolatry. His further delineation of idolatry into two forms – "concrete" and "imaginative" – was merely for the purpose of cutting the ground away from all false views of God. The views of the philosophers on providence and their God-concept and the reasons why Calvin opposed them will, therefore, be treated in this chapter.

Chapters Five and Six will examine the reply of Calvin to all the false views of God the Creator discussed in the previous chapter. It will be evident that Calvin's reply is twofold. The first, which will be dealt with in Chapter Five, is that since Scripture is the only authoritative source of the true view of God the Creator, we must resort to it alone. In emphasising this, Calvin is demonstrating not merely a concern for the authority of Scripture; there are also profound hermeneutical concerns, not least, for his exposition of divine providence. It will be shown that Calvin's emphasis upon the inter-related issues of the perspicuity of Scripture, the principle of divine accommodation, the simplicity of Scripture, the necessity for the Spirit's illumination and faith and piety on the part of the reader of Scripture are integral to that exposition. The significance of Calvin's location of the chapters on Scripture before the *locus classicus* on divine providence and his constant appeal for a Scriptural hermeneutic for his exposition of divine providence cannot be gainsaid. Calvin insists that if one is to know who the God of providence is and what

he is like, one's understanding of the Scriptural representation of this God must embrace a clear understanding of all the above-mentioned inter-related elements which constitute for him a true Scriptural hermeneutic. Without them, one may have the Scriptures and still end up with a false concept of the God of providence, as Calvin's opponents so evidently did.

Chapter Six will then deal with what is certainly the single signal reply to all the false views of God the Creator: that he is the triune God presented in the Scripture. That Calvin should attribute the act of creation and the continued activity of God's providential care and government of his creation to each person of the Trinity indicates that, for Calvin, it is this concept and this alone which is worthy of the Scriptural representation of God the Creator.

Finally, Chapter Seven will conclude with the examination of an example (in this instance, Karl Barth has been selected for very good reasons) of how one can misread Calvin especially with respect to the God-concept the latter employed in his treatment of divine providence. It will be evident that Barth, like so many others, misread Calvin's God-concept largely because they have not given careful consideration to the final location of providence within Calvin's *schema* in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*.

CHAPTER TWO

CALVIN'S CONTROVERSIES AND THE 1559 *INSTITUTES*

That the 1559 *Institutes* was not written in a vacuum has been widely acknowledged by Calvin scholars. In his biography of Calvin, Parker concludes that the development of this final edition of the *Institutes* had been influenced by "Calvin's attention to the Scriptures through so many years of lecturing, preaching and writing commentaries"; "his study of church history and the great theologians of the Church"; and "the controversies in which he had been embroiled as well as his reading of the contemporary theological and religious situation".¹ Ford Lewis Battles has similarly observed:

The successive editorial embodiments of the *Institutio*, achieving in the author's judgment at last a satisfactory literary form in 1559, graphically illustrate how Calvin sorted and resorted the dialogues with his opponents, and in so doing came to an ever more adequate and satisfying (to him) formulation of his reading of the Christian Gospel.²

He also noted that,

The various polemical tracts, some of the dedications of his Biblical commentaries, and relevant letters, evince a growing clarity in his expounding and refuting of the differences between himself and his opponents. This growing clarity is, of course, reflected also in the changes made in successive editions of the *Institutio*.³

The direct bearing of this relationship - between the 1559 *Institutes* and Calvin's other writings - upon his thought on the subject of divine

¹ T H L Parker, *John Calvin* (Tring: Lion Publishing, 1975), 157. See, also, Wendel, *op cit*, 111-122.

² See Battles, "Calculus Fidei" in *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor*, 85.

³ Battles, *ibid*, 89.

providence has not gone unnoticed in recent scholarship, as the rest of this chapter will indicate. However, it is my contention that a re-assessment is now needed because certain aspects of Calvin's polemical writings which bear directly upon the subject of divine providence and the influence this has on his 1559 *Institutes* have been overlooked. It would seem to me that this shortcoming has led to a less than satisfactory evaluation of what lay at the heart of Calvin's concern with regards to his doctrine of divine providence and how that could have influenced the final location of providence in the 1559 *Institutes*.

I. RECENT ASSESSMENTS OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF CALVIN'S CONTROVERSIES

It is now accepted by scholars that providence occupies a prominent place in Calvin's thought that is not confined merely to the *Institutes*. Attention has been drawn to the subject in Calvin's first published work, a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*.⁴ Interest has also been shown on the subject of providence found in several of Calvin's tracts and treatises, especially his 1545 treatise, *Against the Libertines*.⁵ The prominence of providence in Calvin's sermons and letters has also been highlighted by Richard Stauffer.⁶ More recently, Schreiner has examined the relationship

⁴ See, for instance, Reardon, *op cit*, 518; Schreiner, *op cit*, 7.

⁵ Reardon, *ibid*, 529-533; Allen Verhey & Robert C Wilkie, "Calvin's Treatise Against the Libertines", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 (1980): 190-219; Benjamin W Farley, "The Theology of Calvin's Tract Against the Libertines", in *Calvin Studies*, Eds. John H Leith & Charles Raynal (Davidson, N C: Davidson College, 1982), 16-28; Benjamin W Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988). The last mentioned concentrated especially on chapters 13-16 of the said treatise. Farley has also translated and edited the said treatise together with another tract in one volume, namely, *John Calvin: Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982). Note should also be taken of: Christine McCall Probes, "Calvin on Astrology", in *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974-75): 24-33, based upon a close examination of Calvin's 1549 tract, *Advertissement contre l'astrologie qu'on appelle iudiciare*; Paul Helm, "Calvin (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence" in *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 388-405, which draws attention to a much neglected tract of Calvin, the 1558 *Defence of the Secret Providence of God*. There is also a section in Calvin's 1552 treatise, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, which deals with providence.

⁶ Richard Stauffer, *Dieu, la création et la Providence dans la prédication de Calvin* (Berne:

between divine providence and the order of nature, demonstrating how divine providence is a prominent theme in Calvin's sermons on the Old Testament book of Job and his commentary on the Psalms.⁷

What is of particular interest to our purpose, however, is Schreiner's contention that "Calvin developed his view of providence in a polemical context: against the Libertines, astrologers, Stoics, and Epicureans".⁸ While not denying the influence of his sermons and commentaries upon his exposition of creation and providence in the different editions of the *Institutes*, she still contends that to "a large extent, the insertion of creation themes into later editions of the *Institutes* reflects Calvin's controversies with various groups".⁹ This, she believes, explains why the 1559 *Institutes* included the most extended polemics against the misconceptions of these groups.¹⁰ There is also substantial evidence that the entirely new chapter (viz., Book 1, Chapter 18) on providence introduced in the 1559 *Institutes* by Calvin was directly influenced by both his sermons on Job and *The Secret Providence of God*. In this respect, Schreiner has observed that ideas which are discussed seriatim in the *Institutes* are explored in a less organised way, verse by verse, in the sermons on Job.¹¹ She indicates, too, that in the "new chapter added to the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin used the Prologue of Job to

Peter Lang, 1978).

⁷ Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*. See, also, her article, "Through A Mirror Dimly: Calvin's Sermons on Job", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 175-193. This seminal article has been developed into a whole volume entitled *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), which examines Calvin's exegesis of Job from medieval and modern exegetical perspectives. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to a discussion of divine providence as perceived by Calvin through the eyes of Job.

⁸ Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 7.

⁹ "Calvin continued to discuss the nature imagery of the Bible in his commentaries and sermons on Job, Isaiah, and the Psalms. His reflections on the creation themes found in these books bore fruit in the 1559 *Institutes*... Both the Psalms and Isaiah were cited to show that divine providence directed all particular natural and historical events. Finally, his interpretation of Job, namely, that God's will and providence often transcends reason and empirical evidence, recurs in his 1559 exposition on providence." Schreiner, *ibid*, 4.

¹⁰ Schreiner, *ibid*, 5.

¹¹ Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, 92.

prove that there is no mere permission of God".¹² Thus, it would seem to Schreiner, at least, that Calvin's polemical writings form a major contribution to his exposition of providence in the 1559 *Institutes*.

Upon that supposition and further examination of Calvin's objections to his opponents' false views of providence, Schreiner goes on to surmise that in Calvin's view, "both the Libertines and Stoics were guilty of tying God too closely to the world... The Epicureans and the 'Sophists' shared the guilt of separating God too far from his creation".¹³ In a word, as she further asserts, Calvin was more concerned to oppose two opposite but equally false concepts of God which gave rise to his opponents' false views of providence, namely, (1) that which imprisons God within creation (the Stoic, pantheistic, and naturalistic error) and (2) that which would remove God from the world and place him idly in heaven (the Epicurean error).¹⁴

This reading of Calvin on his opponents' false views on providence is supported by Partee who, in his discussion of the influence of classical philosophy upon Calvin's view of providence, has similarly traced Calvin's objection to two opposite concepts of God. The Epicureans, he said, were guilty of making God out to be so transcendent as to be completely unconcerned about the created order. The Stoics were castigated for making God out to be so immanent, he was considered one with nature.¹⁵ Partee

¹² Schreiner, *ibid*, 92. Compare *Inst.* 1.18.1 (229), where Calvin writes: "From the first chapter of Job we know that Satan, no less than the angels who willingly obey, presents himself before God [Job 1:6; 2:1] to receive his commands... However, even though a bare permission to afflict a holy man seems then to be added, yet we gather that God was the author of the trial of which Satan and his wicked thieves were the ministers..."

¹³ Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 16.

¹⁴ Schreiner, *ibid*, 16-21.

¹⁵ "The Epicureans, who appropriate the atomism of Democritus, see the universe as a result of chance, and the Stoic view of necessity sees God as a maker, but not as creator. The philosophy of Aristotle and the Epicureans denies that God is related to the world as creator. The Stoics identify God and nature. Thus they argue the immanence and concern of God in opposition to the Epicurean view of the gods' transcendence and unconcern." See Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, 46-47. Schreiner has made a similar observation, in *The Theater of His Glory*, 16-21.

also highlights an aspect of Calvin's view of providence which differentiates it from that of his opponents: Calvin's emphasis on the particularity of God's care.¹⁶

Schreiner and Partee have, thus, identified two related aspects in the development of Calvin's thought on divine providence. First of all, it would seem to be quite clear that his other writings, not least, his polemical writings on the subject of providence, contributed towards the final form the subject took in the 1559 *Institutes*. As has already been suggested at the beginning of this chapter, in each new edition of his *Institutes*, he not only revised it but (in his own words) also "enriched it with some additions".¹⁷ He confirms as well that his commentaries served a complementary purpose to that of his *Institutes*.¹⁸ This has been noted by Mickelsen who has demonstrated how the growth of the *Institutes* and the commentaries are, in fact, chronologically intertwined.¹⁹

This intimate relationship implies that there was a certain degree of development in Calvin's thought on providence. Whether this should be viewed as a development in terms of its content is something Calvin himself seem to have cautioned against in his 1552 treatise, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*²⁰ and his 1558 treatise, *The Secret Providence of*

¹⁶ Partee, *op cit*, 126-133.

¹⁷ "John Calvin to the Reader", *Inst.*, (3).

¹⁸ "If, after this road has, as it were, been paved, I shall publish any interpretations of Scripture. I shall always condense them, because I shall have no need to undertake long doctrinal discussions, and to digress into commonplaces. ...the program of this instruction is clearly mirrored in my commentaries." See "John Calvin to the Reader", *Inst.*, (5).

¹⁹ John K Mickelsen, "The Relationship Between the Commentaries of John Calvin and His *Institutes* of the Christian Religion, and the Bearing of that Relationship on the Study of Calvin's Doctrine of Scripture", in *Gordon Review* 5 (1959): 155-168. Mickelsen helpfully indicates numerous places in the commentaries where Calvin referred his readers to the *Institutes* for a fuller treatment of a specific doctrine.

²⁰ *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 162: "It cannot be hoped that what I say will match in splendour the greatness and excellence of the subject [of providence]. I shall refer in a few words to what was expounded at greater length in my *Institutes*; and, if authority is needed, I shall attach scriptural proof."

God.²¹ Obviously, in referring his readers to the fuller statements on providence in his *Institutes* in both instances, Calvin cannot be referring to the 1559 *Institutes*. But that he did so should serve to confirm the priority he gave to his exposition of providence in the editions of the *Institutes* prior to the final edition. That much seemed to have been clear. What is also evident is that he seemed to have refined the structure of his treatment of providence over the years. For example, in his treatise, *Against the Libertines*, Calvin distinguished three spheres of providence: the order of nature, mankind and the Church.²² However, in his treatise, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Calvin seems to have proposed a further sphere, squeezed right between the order of nature and mankind - what he terms "the guards God sets for the government and care of particular parts - of such a kind, indeed, that nothing happens but by His will and assent".²³ This same arrangement of four spheres instead of three was maintained in the 1558 *The Secret Providence of God*.²⁴ So, while it is true that the final structure of Calvin's

²¹ *The Secret Providence of God*, 223: "But as I have already treated of the stupendous matter [i.e., providence] in a manner calculated, I hope, to satisfy, in a measure, all sound-minded and unprejudiced readers, I shall only touch it in a summary and passing manner upon the present occasion, adopting all possible brevity... I shall merely recapitulate, in a few bare words, those arguments which I have fully developed in my *Institutes*. But if I shall see such a need, I will now interweave with these arguments some further testimonies from the Holy Scripture."

²² *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, Translated and Edited by Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 242 -249. [All subsequent references to these works will be cited from this English translation.] In relation to the second sphere, Calvin seems to have treated this more comprehensively in *Inst.* 2.4.1-4 and not in *Inst.* 1.16-18, as one might expect. Calvin admits as much in the 1559 *Institutes*: "But because we must discuss this matter again when we discourse in the Second Book concerning man's free and unfree choice, it seems to me that I have now briefly said as much as the occasion calls for." *Inst.* 1.18.2 (232). This indicates that Calvin was not tied to a certain fixed structure but was willing to adapt it according to his purpose. Cf. Wendel, *op cit*, 179f.; Reardon, *op cit*, 529f.

²³ John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Tr. J K S Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961), Section X.3, 164. All subsequent references to this treatise will be taken from this translation.

²⁴ "...first on that general government of the whole world... Secondly, our eyes must rest on the watchfulness of God, in ruling and guarding the single parts and particles of all these created things... We must look, thirdly, at God's most especial care of the human race... And lastly, we must contemplate that peculiar protection by which God defends His church..." *The Secret Providence of God*, 227.

treatment of providence in the 1559 *Institutes* bears little resemblance to any of these earlier treatments, by his own admission that difference in structure must not be taken to mean that the content and theology expressed in the former is not consistent with the latter. Rather, he is asserting the contrary while at the same time informing his readers of the priority of his *Institutes* and, by implication, the priority of his treatment of providence within the *Institutes*.²⁵ Book 1, Chapters 16-18 of the 1559 *Institutes*, according to Calvin himself, is definitive and can, therefore, be safely considered the *locus classicus* of his thought on providence.²⁶

Given the fact, as established above, that Calvin's polemical writings contributed significantly to his exposition of providence in the 1559 *Institutes* it still needs to be asked: in what way did these controversies contribute to Calvin's thought on providence and how did this influence Calvin's final location of providence within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*?

II. A RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF CALVIN'S CONTROVERSIES.

This study suggests that, perhaps, the answer may be found in Calvin's overriding concern to correct what he deems to lie at the heart of his opponents' defective views of providence, namely, their concept of God; and that it was probably this overriding concern which eventually persuaded Calvin to consider seriously the location of providence within his *magnum*

²⁵ Wendel puts it like this: "Not only do the *Institutes* occupy the central place in Calvin's literary production, so abundant in other directions... Whatever interest and value may attach to his other theological writings, the *Institutes* are the faithful summary of the ideas expounded in them." Wendel, *ibid*, 111.

²⁶ Standard treatments of Calvin on providence quite rightly confine themselves to *Inst.* 1.16-18. See, for example, Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Tr. G T Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 251-280; Reinhold Seeberg, *The History of Doctrines*, Volume 2, Tr. Charles E Hays (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 396-398; G C Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 502-525; John Murray, "Calvin on the Sovereignty of God" in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Volume 4 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 191-204; A M Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin* (London: James Clarke, 1950), 135-151; also, Br  nner, *Dogmatics*, Volume 2, 148-192 and Niesel, *ibid*, 70-79.

opus.

While Partee and Schreiner have not suggested the same, they have both traced Calvin's objections to his opponents' false concepts of God. In his discussion of the influence of classical philosophy upon Calvin's view of providence, Partee has traced Calvin's objection to the views of the Epicureans and the Stoics to two opposite concepts of God. The Epicureans, he said, were guilty of making God out to be so transcendent as to be completely unconcerned about the created order. The Stoics were castigated for making God out to be so immanent, he was considered one with nature.²⁷ Similarly, Schreiner surmised that,

In Calvin's view, both the Libertines and Stoics were guilty of tying God too closely to the world... The Epicureans and the "Sophists" shared the guilt of separating God too far from his creation.²⁸

Like Partee, she concluded that Calvin basically opposed two general views: that which imprisons God within creation (the Stoic, pantheistic, and naturalistic error) and that which would remove God from the world and place him idly in heaven (the Epicurean error).²⁹

The above conclusion of Partee and Schreiner finds support in Calvin's providence-related polemical works. For example, in *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Calvin did not merely eschew the Epicurean and the Stoic views of providence.³⁰ He positively asserts the particularity of

²⁷ "The Epicureans, who appropriate the atomism of Democritus, see the universe as a result of chance, and the Stoic view of necessity sees God as a maker, but not as creator. The philosophy of Aristotle and the Epicureans denies that God is related to the world as creator. The Stoics identify God and nature. Thus they argue the immanence and concern of God in opposition to the Epicurean view of the gods' transcendence and unconcern." See Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, 46-47. Schreiner has made a similar observation, cf. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 16-21.

²⁸ Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 16.

²⁹ Schreiner, *ibid*, 16-21.

³⁰ See *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 162, 165-166, 170.

God's providence as compared with a mere universal providence.³¹ That Calvin himself did affirm a sort of universal providence in that he saw the whole universe as under the providential rule of God is clear and undoubted.³² But as Partee has rightly observed, it is Calvin's emphasis on the particularity of God's care which distinguishes his view of providence from that of his opponents.³³ What Partee fails to observe is that this emphasis on God's particular providence arises from what Calvin considers to be "the essential property of the one God."³⁴ Indeed, Calvin bases this particularity upon God's Fatherhood and especially that Fatherhood as revealed in Christ and his special care for the Church. And it is Scripture itself which provides this concept of God's Fatherhood.³⁵ He calls the Church "God's own workshop, in which He exercises His providence - the chief

³¹ "So He is said to rule the world in His providence, not only because he watches the order of nature imposed by Himself, but because He has and exercises a particular care of each one of His creatures." See, *ibid*, 162.

³² *Ibid*, 162: "For it is indeed true, that, as the creation of the world was beautifully ordained by the admirable wisdom of God, so it is unable to persist in being unless it be sustained by his virtue. That the sun should daily rise for us, that in its swift course it has degrees so fitly tempered, that the separate orbits of the stars are wonderfully undisturbed, that the seasons continually recur... this is to be ascribed solely to His directing hand who once made all things." See also, for instance, *Against the Libertines*, 242-243. Indeed, in describing what he believes is the Scriptural concept of divine providence in this treatise, Calvin shows that he is not averse to using the term, *providence universelle* ("universal providence"), and its equivalent, *operation universelle* ("universal operation"). Similarly, *Inst.* 1.16.1 (197), where Calvin affirms God's general preserving and governing activity.

³³ Partee, *op cit*, 126-133.

³⁴ *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 163: "But knowledge of universal providence is by itself vague and confused, unless at the same time we hold that God embraces individual creatures in His care; as Christ also teaches when He says that not even a little sparrow, sold for half a farthing, falls to the ground without the will of the Father (Mt 10:29)." Cf. *Inst.* 1.16.1 (197-198): "But faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver - not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow [cf. Mt 10:29]."

³⁵ Calvin draws a clear distinction between God's general paternal care as Creator of the whole human race and God's special paternal care for his Church in particular: "For though God shows Himself father and judge of the whole human race, yet, since the Church is the sanctuary in which He resides, He there displays His presence with clearer evidence; and there performs the office of father of His family, and honours it, as I may say, in its proper aspect." See, *ibid*, 164.

theatre of the same providence."³⁶ It is this Fatherly care for his Church which Calvin recognises as "truly [God's] paternal protection."³⁷

This concern of Calvin for what he considers to be the Scriptural representation of the God of providence - one that is grounded upon God's Fatherhood as revealed in Christ and through His Church - is similarly evident in *The Secret Providence of God*:

But here we must take a view of other and loftier steps of the Divine Providence. For though God thus shows Himself the Father and the Judge of the whole human race, yet, as the Church is His sanctuary in which He resides, He there manifests His presence by clearer and brighter proofs; He there shows Himself as the Father of His family, and condescends to grant a nearer view of Himself, if I may so speak. The Scripture is filled with testimonies of this, which declare that God keeps a more especial watch over the faithful... In a word, the Church is the great workroom of God, wherein, in a more especial manner, He displays His wonderful works; and it is the more immediate theatre of His glorious Providence.³⁸

Interestingly enough, it was not Calvin alone who recognised the centrality of the God-concept to his exposition of providence. Castellio,³⁹ his opponent in

³⁶ *Ibid*, 164. While Barth maintains that Calvin did not provide a Christian exposition of providence in *Inst.* 1.16-18, he concedes that Calvin did occasionally think along these lines in his commentary on Genesis and in *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*. In Barth's own words: "That Calvin did occasionally think along these lines is shown by the preface to his commentary on Genesis. He there explains that Christ is the image in which God has shown us not merely His heart, namely, His love addressed to us in Him, but also His hand and feet, namely, His external works in the sphere of creation... We find a similar glimpse of light in the statement (*De aet. Dei praed.*, 1552, C.R., 8, 349): *ecclesia propria est Dei officina, in qua suam providentiam exercet et praecipuum eiusdem providentiae theatrum.*" See, Barth, *CD III/3*, 30.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 164-165.

³⁸ *The Secret Providence of God*, 226.

³⁹ For confirmation that Castellio is the opponent in question, see *Écrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques*, 1555-1564 in *Bibliotheca Calviniana*, Ed. Rodolphe Peter and Jean-Francois Gilmont (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1994), 58/1: 663-668. See also W de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin, An Introductory Guide* (Leicester: Apollos, 1993),

The Secret Providence of God, recognised too that their rival views of providence are based ultimately upon their different concepts of God. Not surprisingly, therefore, Castellio ended his objections against Calvin's views in *The Secret Providence of God* with the charge that Calvin's God is the false God and not the true God taught by "nature, reason, and the Holy Scriptures".⁴⁰ In reply, Calvin charges Castellio with exalting reason above Scripture, and of confounding the Christian God, the Father of Christ our Redeemer, with that of, say, the Muslim God. The difference between Calvin's concept of God and that of Castellio cannot be more clearly stated: Calvin claims His God-concept is based upon the Scriptural representation of God as the Father of Jesus Christ while Castellio's God is (to Calvin's mind) a syncretistic conglomeration of ideas of God derived from all sorts of religions.⁴¹

The hard evidence provided by Calvin, therefore, seems to point beyond the two errors concerning the nature of God highlighted by Partee and Schreiner, namely, the immanence and the transcendence of God. This is evident not only in the above two treatises but also in *Against the Libertines*. Calvin did not begin with the Libertines' defective view of providence even though he devoted five of the twenty-four chapters in this treatise to the subject.⁴² Rather, he began by emphasising that the core of

178; similarly, F L Battles, in his edition of the 1559 *Institutes*, especially, *Inst.* 1.17.2, Note 3, p. 212 and *Inst.* 1.18.1, Note 3, p. 229.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 335-336.

⁴¹ "And you would not only set up reason, which, by its blindness, ever extinguishes God's glory as a leader and guide, but would exalt that blind reason above the Scripture itself. What marvel, then, if you should unconcernedly permit all religions of all kinds to be confounded together? And that you should consider the Turk, who is enveloped in the deliriums of Mahomet, and who adores as his deity no one knows what, as much a worshipper of God as he who calls upon the Father of Christ our Redeemer, instructed by the sure word and faith of the everlasting Gospel?" See, *ibid*, 342.

⁴² *Against the Libertines*, chapters 13-16. It is not within the scope of this study to discuss the accuracy of Calvin's representation of the teaching propounded by the Libertines. Rather, taking Calvin's own evaluation at face value, this study seeks to explore what are some major issues which concerned Calvin himself in this controversy. For a more detailed discussion of whether Calvin read the views of the Libertines accurately, see *John Calvin: Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, Trans. and Ed. by Benjamin Wirt Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 162-173; Allen Verhey, "Calvin's Treatise 'Against

their doctrine and its origins date from the time of the apostles and is not dissimilar to what the Gnostics, Cerdonites (or Marcionites), and Manichees held.⁴³ While recognising that the Libertines held common ground with all these groups in their pantheistic belief in one single Spirit or universal essence and that man's soul is synonymous with this Spirit,⁴⁴ Calvin's other primary concern seems to be their particular concept of God and, indeed, their false conception of the Persons of the divine Trinity which arises from this pantheistic belief. It could be said, for Calvin, that it was precisely this false concept which led the Libertines to deny the Scriptural concept of divine providence.

At the beginning of his treatment on providence in this treatise, he traces their defective view of providence to their confusing God with his creation.⁴⁵ The most dire consequence of such a confusion is that "if this is

the Libertines", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 (1980): 190-219; George H Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 580-605.

⁴³ *Against the Libertines*, Chapter 1, 190.

⁴⁴ "We have already singled out above several sects which from ancient time troubled the Christian church with musings which, if not exactly similar, were close to this view: that souls and heavenly spirits, being of God's very own substance, were taken like coals from a fire. ...they maintain as a principle that both Scripture and nature teach us that the eternal Spirit of God is the source and origin of everything. This we readily concede. But it does not follow from this that He did not give each creature a unique being and substance. It is quite another thing to say that every creature comes from God and that what God has created is God Himself." *Against the Libertines*, Chapter 11, 231. Cf. Chapter 3, 198.

⁴⁵ "After creating a single spirit among themselves... the Libertines maintain that this single spirit constitutes everything. By this they do not mean what the Scripture means when it says that at the same time all creatures subsist in Him, are equally guided by Him, are subject to His providence, and serve His will, each according to its order. But they mean that everything in the world must be seen directly as His doing." See *ibid.*, Chapter 13, 238. Cf. Chapter 11 (231-231): "Saint Paul says that 'in Him we live and have our being,' by virtue of which we are rightly called 'His offspring' (Acts 17:28). But this does not mean that God is the spiritual nature that indwells man. True, we subsist in Him, insofar as we do not have our foundation in ourselves [i.e., are not self-caused]. But there is a vast difference between being the 'work' and the 'worker' himself... Nevertheless, since this is the case, let us listen to their grand arguments: there is only one God who [truly] exists. I admit that. But we do not cease to subsist in Him, as He created us at a specific time for this purpose and upholds us by His power." Acts 17:28, as will be evident, features prominently in Calvin's discussion on providence. He employs it in *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (163) and *The Secret Providence of God* (224-225). Most significantly, of the six occasions he employed this Scripture text in his 1559 *Institutes*, all are found in Book 1 where the *locus classicus* on providence is located.

the case there would be no difference whatsoever between God and the devil, as in fact the God whom they invent for us is an idol worse than the devil of hell."⁴⁶ Calvin, in fact, goes further to accuse the Libertines of not only forging "a God in their image" but also "forging a Jesus Christ in the same mould".⁴⁷ According to Calvin, they made Jesus Christ out to be no more than a phantom in the process.⁴⁸

So, while it is true to say that Calvin was concerned to show that it is their pantheistic tendency which led to their false concept of God, it must be said that Calvin was equally concerned for the consequence of such a tendency, namely, their false concept of the Triune God. It is not merely a faulty conception of the transcendence or immanence of God; it is, rather, a concept of God which is not true to the Trinitarian concept presented in Scripture. That it is this which bothered him is highlighted by what he prescribes as the first remedy for not falling into the Libertine error:

Since our Lord has promised to manifest Himself to those who seek Him in fear and humility, if we want to come to Him, then let us take this route. Let us strive to come to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus, not presuming to mount so high by our own understanding, but by praying Him to render us capable of growing in His teaching. For we cannot do this if we have not renounced the presumption of wanting to be wise beyond measure. Let us desire nothing save to know one sole God through our Lord Jesus, and to aspire to no other goal - as in truth God does not teach us any other knowledge by His Word.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, Chapter 13, 241. Calvin listed two other consequences of such a pantheistic view, viz., men would no longer have a conscience for abstaining from evil, and that we would never be able on that count to make any judgments between good and evil.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Chapter 17, 259.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, Chapter 17, 259. Cf. Chapter 3, 195; Chapter 10, 227.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Chapter 6, 211.

The christological emphasis⁵⁰ above is noteworthy as it indicates that Calvin was not merely dealing with a faulty God-concept; he was aware he was dealing also with a faulty pneumatology (confounding the Spirit with the one universal essence), not to say, a faulty christology as well. Much more, then, seem to be at stake in the Libertine error than their pantheistic belief. At the root of it, Calvin perceived they were promoting a faulty doctrine of the Triune God who alone is worthy of the Scriptural representation of the God of providence.

That it was this faulty concept of God in his providence-related polemical writings which he sought to address in his 1559 *Institutes* is evident from two collaborating features found in the 1559 *Institutes*. It is the task of the next section to examine these two features which have been largely ignored by recent scholarship on Calvin's thought on divine providence.

III. A NEGLECTED ASPECT: THE *LOCUS CLASSICUS* IN CONTEXT

The first feature involves the new material Calvin incorporated into Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. Battles has remarked that the 1559 edition was about 80 per cent larger than the edition it superseded.⁵¹ A careful examination of Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes* reveals the following statistics in terms of new material incorporated.⁵² Of the 158 sections in Book 1, 102 sections (64 per cent of Book 1) had new material incorporated. Of these, 32 whole sections (20 per cent of Book 1) and more than half of 24

⁵⁰ Note the emphasis: "Let us strive to come to the knowledge of our *Lord Jesus*", and later on, "to know one sole God through our *Lord Jesus*". Note also his observation that the Libertines' method for coming to a knowledge of the true God is defective because they depended on their own knowledge and not what is revealed in Scripture. Implied in his observation, obviously, is also their faulty hermeneutics which he exposes in Chapters 7-10 in this same treatise.

⁵¹ Battles, in the *Introduction* to his translation of the 1559 *Institutes*, xxxviii.

⁵² See Appendices C and D at the end of this study. As noted in Appendix C, all editorial additions have been checked against *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta, Volume 3*, edited by P Barth and W Niesel (Monachii in Aedibus: Chr. Kaiser, 1926-1936).

sections (15 per cent of Book 1) are completely new to the 1559 *Institutes*. It should also be noted that in the case of chapters 2, 6, 16 and 18, all sections have had some new material incorporated.

Admittedly, not all the new material has a direct bearing upon Calvin's treatment of divine providence. There is, however, substantial evidence within Book 1 that the above-mentioned concerns in Calvin's providence-related polemical writings found their way into the definitive edition of his *Institutes*. The most obvious of these is his concern for the Scriptural concept of the Triune God of providence. For instance, Calvin added a whole new section on the person and work of the angel of the Lord to substantiate the direct involvement of the Son in divine providence.⁵³ In the 1543 edition, Calvin had already mentioned the ministry of the angel of the Lord, the same of which he has left intact in the 1559 edition.⁵⁴ However, he provided no clear hint as to who he thought that personage was. In the 1559 edition, he asserts that the angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Christ not only in his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity in *Inst.* 1.13.10, but also in his treatment on angels.⁵⁵

Similarly, in the 1543 edition, Calvin had insisted that "God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing; that thereupon he brought forth living beings and inanimate things out of every kind..."⁵⁶ He goes on to add, "We shall likewise learn that he nourishes some in secret ways..."⁵⁷ Whether Calvin meant his readers to infer that both the Word and the Spirit were involved in nourishing what has been created is unclear. Obviously, Calvin seems not to have offered a clear statement that the Word and the Spirit nourish some in secret

⁵³ *Inst.* 1.13.10 (132-134).

⁵⁴ See *Inst.* 1.14.6 (166-167), which is substantially the 1543 edition.

⁵⁵ *Inst.* 1.14.9 (170), which is a new addition in the 1559 *Institutes*.

⁵⁶ *Inst.* 1.14.20 (179-180).

⁵⁷ *Inst.* 1.14.20 (180).

ways or even, that the Father nourishes some in secret ways by the power of His Word and Spirit. But in the 1559 *Institutes*, that uncertainty is cleared up with the addition of a statement to the effect that the whole of creation is not only preserved by the Spirit, but that the same divine power attributed to God is attributed to the Spirit.⁵⁸

All these, Calvin claims, can be substantiated by Scripture. In fact, Calvin included some new material to show which Scripture substantiates his claim.⁵⁹ That, as noted in the previous section of this chapter, was one of the key issues in his providence-related polemical writings.⁶⁰ Of course, Calvin also found support from the “orthodox doctors”.⁶¹ But as Chapter Six of this study will indicate, far more important than the testimony of the early Church fathers is that of Scripture itself. This explains why Calvin incorporated seven whole new sections in *Inst.* 1.13 to deal, primarily, with the error of Servetus.⁶² As Chapter Six of this study will demonstrate, Servetus had relied heavily upon ante-Nicene patristic writers, especially Irenaeus and Tertullian, for his opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity. Calvin, in these new sections, goes to great lengths to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is, primarily, based solidly upon Scripture and only, secondarily, based upon the support of Irenaeus and Tertullian.⁶³ Indeed, the fault of Servetus was that he misused these early Church fathers’ testimonies.

Closely related to his emphasis on the scriptural concept of the Triune God is Calvin’s incorporation of new material which insists upon

⁵⁸ *Inst.* 1.13.14 (139) and *Inst.* 1.13.14 (140) respectively.

⁵⁹ See *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129-130), 1.13.8 (131), where he collates Genesis 1 with Hebrews 1:2-3, John 1:1-3, John 5:17 and John 17:5 as Scriptural evidence.

⁶⁰ See pages 34-35, and 37.

⁶¹ “But the orthodox doctors of the church have rightly and prudently interpreted that chief angel to be God’s Word”, *Inst.* 1.13.10 (133); “I deliberately omit many testimonies that the church fathers used”, *Inst.* 1.13.15 (140).

⁶² *Inst.* 1.13.22-23 and *Inst.* 1.13.25-29.

⁶³ Calvin devotes more new material to the Scriptural proofs (*Inst.* 1.13.22-26) than to the support of these two early church fathers (*Inst.* 1.13.27-28).

this concept as defining the distinction between the true God from all false gods.⁶⁴ In fact, a substantial amount of new material incorporated in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes* deals with the distinction between the true God and false gods.⁶⁵ That this distinction should be treated so thoroughly and over such a wide range of chapters in Book 1 is an indication of Calvin's purpose: he meant, on the one hand, to cut the ground from under all false concepts of God, and on the other, to show the connection between the doctrines of the Trinity, creation and providence. As Chapter Four of this study will demonstrate, false concepts of God affect not only the doctrine of the Trinity, but also the Scriptural doctrine of creation and divine providence. It is for that reason that among the new material incorporated is the error of Epicurus.⁶⁶ The Epicureans might not deny the existence of God or gods, but they nevertheless imply the opposite by denying the Scriptural account of creation and providence. It will also be evident from Chapter Four of this study that all these three doctrines – the Trinity, creation and providence – are of a piece for Calvin. A false view of God will result in a false view of creation and providence, just as a false view of creation and providence (as in the case of Epicurus) will result in a false view of God.

It is, therefore, not surprising, that right from the beginning of Book 1 of his 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin should incorporate new material that reflected this concern to keep creation and providence together. This is evident in his delineation of the *duplex cognitio*⁶⁷. It is even more so in his treatment of the *duplex cognitio Dei*⁶⁸ which, incidentally, is new to the 1559 *Institutes*. In

⁶⁴ "But God also designates himself by another special mark to distinguish himself more precisely from idols. For he so proclaims himself the sole God as to offer himself to be contemplated clearly in three persons", *Inst.* 1.13.2 (122). Cf. *Inst.* 1.13.20 (144-145).

⁶⁵ See, for instance, *Inst.* 1.4.2 (49), 1.5.4 (55-56), 1.5.5 (56-58), 1.5.12-13 (64-68), 1.10.3 (98-99), 1.11.1 (99-100), 1.11.4 (103-104), 1.12.1 (116-117), 1.12.3 (120), 1.13.1 (120-121).

⁶⁶ *Inst.* 1.2.2 (41); 1.5.4 (56); 1.5.12 (65-66).

⁶⁷ *Inst.* 1.1.1 (35-36).

⁶⁸ *Inst.* 1.2.1 (39-40); 1.6.1 (70-71); 1.6.2 (72); 1.10.1 (97).

every instance of the latter, Calvin insists that to know God as Creator is to know Him as the God of providence. You cannot have one without the other. In his delineation of the true God from false gods, Calvin consistently incorporates new material stating to the effect that it is not God's nature to have created the world and not continue to sustain and govern it.⁶⁹ In dealing with the doctrine of creation, he also incorporated new material to indicate that providence is never far from his mind.⁷⁰ This will be borne out in greater detail in Chapter Three of this study.

Not to be overlooked is the incorporation of new material related to the perspicuity and interpretation of Scripture and their relation to Calvin's concept of the limitations of piety. At first glance, these may appear to be completely divorced from Calvin's treatment of divine providence; but they are not. We have noted how in his providence-related polemical writings, Calvin was insistent that contrary to his opponents' claim, he was more Scripturally based than they were in his representation of God, not least, in that representation as the Triune God. This contention over whose concept of God is more Scriptural, according to Calvin, is closely bound to one's understanding of the perspicuity of Scripture and how one actually does hermeneutics. That this was a matter of serious concern to Calvin will be evident in Chapter Five of this study. It is evident also in the new material incorporated into *Inst.* 1.16-18. That new material basically involved further supporting Scriptural evidence for Calvin's exposition of divine providence,⁷¹ and the need for a Scriptural hermeneutic within the limits of piety. The latter is based upon the perspicuity of Scripture and the necessity for faith and piety on the part of the reader.⁷² Indeed, *Inst.* 1.18 is a wonderful example of

⁶⁹ *Inst.* 1.4.2 (48); 1.5.3 (54-55)*; 1.5.4 (55-56)*; 1.5.5 (56-58)*; 1.5.6 (58-59); 1.5.8 (60-61); 1.5.10 (63); 1.6.3 (73). Note that some of these (those with an asterisk *) are completely new sections incorporated into the 1559 *Institutes*.

⁷⁰ *Inst.* 1.14.2 (161-162).

⁷¹ For instance, note the incorporation of new Scriptural evidence (with appropriate comments) in the following: *Inst.* 1.16.1 (198); 1.16.2 (199); 1.16.4 (202); 1.16.5 (204); 1.16.6 (205); 1.16.7 (205-206); 1.16.9 (209-210); 1.17.2 (212-214); 1.17.8 (221); 1.17.11 (225); and most of *Inst.* 1.18 (228-237).

⁷² Note especially *Inst.* 1.17.1-3 (210-215), where Calvin provides a brief summary of

precisely what Calvin meant. In dealing with the various difficulties in the doctrine of divine providence, Calvin showed his own commitment to the perspicuity of Scripture,⁷³ accepted his own incapacity to understand all that God has revealed in Scripture,⁷⁴ and emphasised the necessity for faith, piety and humility.⁷⁵

It is true that this concern for a Scriptural hermeneutic within the limits of piety is not confined to Calvin's treatment of divine providence. In his exposition of Scripture in *Inst.* 1.6, Calvin incorporated almost a whole new paragraph on that concern.⁷⁶ Elsewhere, he also incorporated new material related to the perspicuity of Scripture, the necessity for faith, piety and the illumination of the Holy Spirit if one is to interpret Scripture correctly.⁷⁷ But that Calvin should incorporate so much new material in *Inst.* 1.16-18 on the subject should alert us to the importance of this subject to his treatment of divine providence. Chapter Five of this study will demonstrate that importance.

It would seem evident from the above that much of the new material incorporated in the 1559 *Institutes* that has a direct bearing on Calvin's treatment on divine providence was influenced, therefore, by his polemical writings. The latter seemed to have alerted him to the need for a more comprehensive and complete treatment of divine providence especially

his own hermeneutical approach to the subject of divine providence. For instance, his belief that the Bible is perspicuous about providence, though it is a mystery, 1.17.2 (213), the need to understand the end (and the good and right use) of this doctrine, 1.17.1 (210), the necessity of humility, awe, reverence, soberness, moderation and piety in one's hermeneutics, 1.17.1 (211, 212), 1.17.2 (212, 213, 214), and the Spirit's guidance, 1.17.3 (214-215).

⁷³ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (232-233).

⁷⁴ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (234); 1.18.4 (237).

⁷⁵ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (233); 1.18.4 (237).

⁷⁶ *Inst.* 1.6.2 (72).

⁷⁷ *Inst.* 1.7.4 (79); 1.7.5 (81); 1.8.11 (90-91); 1.9.1 (93). Also, much of the new material incorporated in Calvin's critique of Servetus' error on the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, *Inst.* 1.13.22-29, revolves around the same concern. Calvin makes no bones that Servetus' error arose from "impiety", see *Inst.* 1.13.22 (148), 1.13.23 (149), 1.13.24 (151), 1.13.25 (154).

within a Trinitarian context. Of course, in the process, other interrelated themes were also addressed.

However, there is a second feature in the 1559 Institutes which would seem to confirm this influence of his providence-related polemical writings, namely, the new arrangement of the chapters in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. As noted earlier, Calvin had struggled with the location of providence in the 1559 *Institutes*, and toyed with the possibility of linking providence closely with creation.⁷⁸ But it was not just the movement of providence into Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes* that concerned Calvin, for the final edition also witnessed a substantial movement of several other sections from their respective positions in the 1539-1554 editions. Of particular interest to this study is the movement of some sections into Book 1 of the final edition.

For instance, Battles has noted that throughout "all editions the doctrine of the Trinity stands prior to the analysis of the first article of the Apostles' Creed (the Creator), but up to 1559 it followed immediately the discussion of Christ as the sole object (*scopus*) of faith".⁷⁹ However, in the 1559 *Institutes*, the treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity was moved to Book 1. Dowey has similarly observed:

For his final edition Calvin collected these three doctrines together as follows: The doctrine of the Trinity (*Inst.* 1.13) was brought from its place as prologue to the Apostles' Creed analysis where it had been classified under the general category of "faith". The doctrine of the general creation (*Inst.* 1.14) was taken from the analysis of the first article of the Creed, and that of the creation of man in the state of perfection (*Inst.* 1.15) was separated from the material on the fallen state with which it had stood in the chapter *De cognitione hominis, et*

⁷⁸ See Chapter 1, pages 20-21 of this study where the several developments in 1539, 1543 and 1545 give us cause to believe he had thought about this very carefully before. Not insignificantly, these developments all came before his most important providence-related polemical works, of which the 1545 treatise *Against the Libertines* was the first.

⁷⁹ Battles' edition of the *Institutes* 1559, (120), Note 1.

libero arbitrio... The doctrine of providence (*Inst.* 1.16-18) was detached from the chapter *De praedestinatione et providentia Dei*, which had stood in the series of chapters on justification.⁸⁰

A careful examination of the attached Appendices A and B⁸¹ will demonstrate that the movements did not merely involve Chapters 13-18 of the final edition, as Dowey has indicated above. They also involve the movement of Chapters 11-12 of the final edition, which deal with the subject of idolatry, from its position in Calvin's discussion of the law in previous editions. It should be noted too that Chapter 18 is almost a new chapter altogether. Thus, it would be more accurate to say (*contra* Dowey's observation above) that it was *Inst.* 1.16-17 which was moved and not *Inst.* 1.16-18 as such.⁸² Essentially, then, seven chapters out of the eighteen in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*, viz. Chapters 11-17, were moved from their positions in the 1539-1554 editions; and one new chapter (Chapter 18) was also added to the final edition.

Keeping in view Calvin's opening remarks to the readers of his 1559 *Institutes*, that he was "never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth",⁸³ could it be that Calvin did not intend the movement of providence into Book 1 of the final edition to be treated, as it were, in isolation? Rather, did he intend the movement to be seen as an integral part of a larger movement of the sections already mentioned above? After all, as has already been noted, these sections (and a new chapter) were moved together into Book 1 of the final edition at the same time. Furthermore, the placement of Calvin's treatment of the Trinity and, particularly, of general creation and the creation of man in the chapters just

⁸⁰ Dowey, *op cit*, 126.

⁸¹ See Note 44 of Chapter 1, page 16, for references to these appendices.

⁸² This has already been suggested on page 28 of this chapter. Battles writes (in his edition of the 1559 *Institutes*, Note 1, p. 228): "This chapter, new in 1559, treats many issues that appear incidentally in other contexts..." This is indicated by the square box around Book 1, Chapter 18 in Appendix B.

⁸³ "John Calvin to the Reader", *Inst.*, (3).

preceding his discussion of providence must be treated with all seriousness as part of his intended *schema* for the 1559 edition since, as noted before, this was not the first time Calvin had thought about the link between creation and providence.

That such a reading of Calvin's intention is not improbable has already been noted by Warfield and Dowey. The former, commenting on Calvin's definition of creation in *Inst.* 1.14.20,⁸⁴ observed that Calvin sets the act of creation in its proper Trinitarian relation. While admittedly Calvin does not dwell upon the part which the Son takes in creation in Chapters 14-15, Warfield concedes that this important matter is not actually overlooked for it has already been dealt with in the preceding chapter where Calvin adduces the share they took in creation in proof of the deity of the Son and the Spirit.⁸⁵ The implication seems to be, in Warfield's opinion anyway, that Calvin saw no necessity to go over the same ground in Chapters 14-15 since he has already dealt with the participation of the Son and the Spirit in creation in Chapter 13. That the Triune God is involved in the act of creation is, therefore, presupposed in Calvin's treatment of creation. Similarly, Dowey has observed that it "was the Triune God who created the world. Hence, Calvin's doctrine of creation follows the doctrine of the Trinity".⁸⁶

What is baffling, however, is that while both Warfield and Dowey see no difficulty in insisting upon the foundational nature of Calvin's exposition of the Triune God in Chapter 13 for his treatment of creation in Chapters 14-15, they seem not to have insisted upon the same with regards to Calvin's treatment of providence in Chapters 16-18. In fact, one searches in vain for a

⁸⁴ "From this history we shall learn that God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing; that thereupon he brought forth living beings and inanimate things of every kind, that in a wonderful series he distinguished an innumerable variety of things, that he endowed each kind with its own nature, assigned functions, appointed places and stations; and that, although all were subject to corruption, he nevertheless provided for the preservation of each species until the Last Day."

⁸⁵ B B Warfield, "Calvin and Calvinism", Volume V of *The Works of Benjamin B Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 289-291.

⁸⁶ Dowey, *op cit*, 128.

similar, if not, equal insistence upon the bearing Chapter 13 has on Chapters 16-18. If, as they have surmised, Calvin intended his God-concept in Chapter 13 to regulate or circumscribe his treatment of creation, why should the same God-concept not apply to his treatment of providence? To echo Dowey's observation, could it not be equally true to say that, "It was the Triune God who governed and sustained the world. Hence, Calvin's doctrine of divine providence follows logically from the doctrines of the Trinity and creation"? After all, did Calvin not deal with the participation of the Son and the Spirit in providence as well in his exposition of the Trinity in Chapter 13?

The omission of providence on the part of Warfield and Dowey may be a reflection of the relative importance they place upon Calvin's doctrines of creation and providence respectively. That this is no mere conjecture is seen in the space they give to Calvin's doctrine of providence. In discussing the historical development of the different editions of the *Institutes*, Dowey does not emphasise the significance of the final location of providence within Book 1,⁸⁷ and omits the importance of Calvin's discussion of providence in relation to the knowledge of God the Creator.⁸⁸ Similarly, in his discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator in Calvin, Warfield gives only a cursory mention of providence.⁸⁹ And yet, as the next four chapters will demonstrate, providence is not only a prominent theme in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. It forms an integral part of Calvin's whole

⁸⁷ Dowey, *ibid*, 41-49. He did note the following, however: "The doctrine of providence was detached from the chapter *De praedestinatione et providentia Dei*, which had stood in the series of chapters on justification." See, *ibid*, 127.

⁸⁸ Dowey, *ibid*, 50-86. Dowey seems to have ignored the prominence of divine providence in Calvin's exposition, especially in *Inst.* 1.1-15. He devotes only three pages to his most extended treatment of Calvin on divine providence in the *Institutes* and, even then, it is confined to the *locus classicus*. See, *ibid*, 129-131.

⁸⁹ B B Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of The Knowledge of God", in *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 29-130. One weakness of Warfield's treatment of *Inst.* 1.1-15, in a series of four articles printed in *The Princeton Theological Review* 7 (1909), reprinted in *The Works of Benjamin B Warfield, Volume 5* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 29-349, is his overlooking Calvin's emphasis on providence and Calvin's consistent concern to keep creation and, by implication, God the Creator and providence together in these early chapters of the *Institutes*. To his credit, though, Warfield notes the importance of providence when he discusses Calvin's doctrine of creation as expounded in *Inst.* 1.14-15. See Warfield, *ibid*, 287-349.

discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator and is intimately linked with the other sections which were moved simultaneously with it.

It will also be evident that any proper discussion of the God-concept Calvin employed in his treatment of providence must give serious consideration to the final *schema* Calvin had in mind for Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. That Calvin should incorporate so much new material and re-arrange the order of the chapters of Book 1 should alert us to the fact that here was the final *schema* with which he was fully satisfied.⁹⁰ That final *schema* involved not just his treatment of divine providence but also other interrelated themes in Book 1. Nor does it merely involve just the new material and the new arrangement of the chapters. Rather, Calvin was at pains to ensure that the new material and new arrangement he incorporated should collaborate with the existing material of the preceding edition of the *Institutes* to achieve the *schema* he envisaged for Book 1 of the final edition.

It is, therefore, the contention of this study that if one is to arrive at a proper understanding of the God-concept Calvin employed in his treatment of providence, one will have to take seriously not only the final location of providence within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*, but also the final context within which Calvin has located it. To omit a proper discussion of these matters is to overlook what is, for Calvin, a very crucial aspect of his final *schema* for Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*.

⁹⁰ "John Calvin to the Reader", *Inst.*, (3): "Although I did not regret the labour spent, I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth." Also, *ibid*, (4): "For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents."

CHAPTER THREE

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THE CREATOR AND PROVIDENCE

The previous chapter has suggested that the final movement of providence was intended as an integral part of a larger movement involving five other chapters which would fit into Calvin's envisaged *schema* for Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. That this is likely the case, it has been suggested, is evident from the content of the five chapters preceding the chapters on providence. It would seem that Calvin had placed providence right after these chapters so as to link together, on the one hand, his God-concept and providence and, on the other, creation and providence. The final location of Calvin's treatment of the Trinity, in particular, cannot be ignored because if, as his controversial writings on providence have revealed, his primary criticism of his opponents' views on providence relates to their defective God-concept, surely this final location of Trinity just prior to creation and providence must say something for that God-concept in relation to the latter two doctrines.

This chapter and the next three will examine the data available in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes* with the purpose of demonstrating that the above reading of Calvin is accurate and not mere conjecture. The bearing this has on the particular God-concept Calvin intended for his treatment of providence will become evident with each ensuing chapter.

While discussion of the primacy of the knowledge of God the Creator in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes* has not been scanty,¹ the same cannot be

¹ See, for example, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, Tr. Peter Fraenkel (London: The Centenary Press, 1946); Dowey, *op cit*; T H L Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1969); E David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra-Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1966), 101-105; Charles Partee, *op cit*, 44-46; also, T F Torrance, "Knowledge of God and Speech about Him According to John Calvin", in *Theology in Reconstruction* (London, 1965), 78-79; Arthur C Cochrane, "Preliminary Aspects of Calvin's Epistemology", in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 13 (1944): 382-393; T A Noble, "Our Knowledge of God According to John Calvin", in *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982):2-13; Dewey J Hoitenga, Jr, "The Universal Awareness of God: John Calvin", in *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 143-174; Cornelius van der Kooi, "Within Proper Limits: Basic Features of John Calvin's Theological Epistemology", in



said of Calvin's exposition of divine providence in the first fifteen chapters of his 1559 *Institutes*. As we have noticed, both Dowey and Warfield failed in that regard.² While Parker fared better when he opined that there are three principal passages on divine providence in Book 1 of the *Institutes*,³ he devotes only a small space to a discussion of these passages and even less to the relationship between the knowledge of God the Creator and providence in these passages.⁴

As this chapter will reveal, providence is not only an important theme alongside other equally important and interrelated themes in Book 1. It will also reveal that Calvin's treatment of providence cannot be divorced from what, for him, forms the central theme of Book 1, namely, the knowledge of God the Creator. It cannot be gainsaid that these two factors provide the central clue as to why he located providence within Book 1. This is evident not only from Calvin's introductory and subsequent remarks on the *duplex cognitio* and *duplex cognitio Dei*. It is also evident from the way in which Calvin constantly reverts, throughout Book 1, to his initial observation that providence is intimately linked to his discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator. Further evidence is supplied by Calvin's consistent endeavour to keep together both creation and providence throughout Book 1. The purpose of that, as we shall see, is to refute the many false ideas of God which he has had to oppose in his controversial writings, not least, those directly related to providence. All these, I suggest, point us in one direction: that Calvin sees his doctrine of providence as integral to his whole discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator and therefore, it should not surprise us that his treatment of providence should be located within Book 1 of the 1559

Calvin Theological Journal 29 (1994): 364-387.

² See Chapter 2, pages 45-47 of this study.

³ "The principal passages on the subject in the *Institutio* are three in number and occur in Book I. The first (chap. 5, §§ 7-8) comes in the context of his exposition on the *opera Dei*; the second, rather more brief, in chap. 14, § 22; and the third is the extended essay on the doctrine of providence which ends the first book (chap. 16-18)." See, Parker, *op cit*, 40-41.

⁴ See Parker, *ibid*, 40-44.

Institutes.

As this chapter aims primarily to provide a general survey of Calvin's discussion of providence within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*, all detailed examination of how it is integrated into his envisaged *schema* will be postponed for the moment. The latter will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this study.

I. **INST. 1.1-2: PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF THE *DUPLEX COGNITIO DEI* AND PROVIDENCE**

Scholarly accounts of *Inst.* 1.1-2 have generally concentrated upon whether Calvin intended the structure of his *Institutes* to be viewed as a *duplex cognitio Dei* or merely a *duplex cognitio*.⁵ What have seldom been discussed are (1) Calvin's integration of divine providence into his treatment of the *duplex cognitio* and, especially, the *duplex cognitio Dei*; and (2) his overriding concern to keep creation and providence together in presenting his particular concept of God as Creator.

For instance, when delineating the *duplex cognitio* he maintains that by an honest observation of ourselves we should eventually be led to a knowledge of God, a knowledge that certainly includes His kind providence.⁶ The fact that the first man cast us into a "miserable ruin" serves to remind us not only of our poverty but also "discloses the infinitude of benefits reposing in God".⁷ Thus, from the outset, Calvin already links his treatment of the

⁵ The two positions are best represented by Dowey and Parker. Dowey argues for a *duplex cognitio Dei* comprising of the knowledge of God the Creator and God the Redeemer. Parker, while not denying Dowey's view, argues for a *duplex cognitio* comprising of the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

⁶ "In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he 'lives and moves' [Acts 17:28]. For, quite clearly, the mighty gifts with which we are endowed are hardly from ourselves; indeed, our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God. Then, by the benefits shed like dew from heaven upon us, we are led as by rivulets to the spring itself." *Inst.* 1.1.1 (35-36). We have noted on p 37 of Chapter 2 (Note 45) Calvin's employment of Acts 17:28 in his polemical works on divine providence. Here is the first instance of such an employment in the 1559 *Institutes*. Significantly, it is employed in the context of Calvin's delineation of the *duplex cognitio*.

⁷ He goes on to add: "Thus, from the feeling of our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity,

duplex cognitio with divine providence. For him, the knowledge of ourselves should lead us to a contemplation not only of our poverty but also upon the goodness of God and the benefits He has showered upon us.

That this is not an isolated conception with Calvin is evident from the beginning of Book 2 of the *Institutes* where, according to him, knowledge of ourselves comprises not merely a consideration of what we were given at creation but also "how generously God continues his favour toward us".⁸ Calvin, it cannot be doubted, is concerned here to include providence within the knowledge of ourselves. Indeed, he would insist that such a link between the knowledge of ourselves and providence is necessary because it is only then that we realise "there is nothing of our own, but that we hold on sufferance whatever God has bestowed upon us" and that we are "ever dependent on him".⁹ Thus, it would seem that here in Book 1, chapter 1, he already introduces what is of crucial importance in his thought, namely, the integration of divine providence within his treatment of the *duplex cognitio*.

This is further supported by Book 1, Chapter 2 when in his preliminary discussion of the *duplex cognitio Dei*, Calvin takes for granted that the knowledge of God the Creator cannot be divorced from the knowledge of his providence:

Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel that God as our Maker supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings - and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ. First, as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows himself to be simply the Creator.

and - what is more - depravity and corruption, we recognise that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone. To this extent we are prompted by our own ills to contemplate the good things of God." See *Inst.* 1.1.1 (36-37).

⁸ *Inst.* 2.1.1 (242). Cf. *Inst.* 1.14.22 (182) and *Inst.* 1.15, where Calvin discusses what we were given at creation.

⁹ *Inst.* 2.1.1 (242).

Then in the face of Christ [cf. 2 Cor 4:6] he shows himself the Redeemer.¹⁰

The two cannot be separated in Calvin's mind: to know God as Creator logically includes a knowledge of his continued activity of providence.¹¹ He insists that this is "the general teaching of Scripture", meaning, of course, that the logical connection he has established between creation and providence is founded upon the Scriptural concept of God as the "Maker" or "Creator". This reliance of Calvin upon the Scriptural concept of God as Creator is, as shall be evident, basic to his exposition of divine providence.

Not to be overlooked here is his earliest hint of the decisive role of God's Fatherhood as the paradigm for his exposition of divine providence. It would appear, from his introductory remarks on the *duplex cognitio Dei*, that creation and providence are not related to God's Fatherhood since, according to Calvin, the experience of God's Fatherhood is subsumed under the knowledge of God the Redeemer.¹² And yet, in the same breath, Calvin implies that the knowledge of God the Creator and, by implication, the knowledge of the God of providence, are nothing more nor less than the knowledge of his fatherly care. Thus, while commenting on the need to be

¹⁰ *Inst.* 1.2.1 (40).

¹¹ "Moreover, to make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work, would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception... For unless we pass on to his providence - however we may seem both to comprehend with the mind and to confess with the tongue - we do not properly grasp what it means to say: 'God is Creator'... But faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver..." *Inst.* 1.16.1 (197). That Calvin should begin *Inst.* 1.16-18 with the reminder that creation and providence are inseparably joined is an intimation of his determination to keep his discussion of providence within the context of his treatment of the knowledge of God the Creator. Indeed, in *Inst.* 1.16.1, he emphasises precisely this time and again, no doubt with the intention of reminding his readers that the *locus classicus* is not to be studied in isolation from the preceding chapters.

¹² "In this ruin of mankind no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of salvation or favourable in anyway, until Christ the Mediator comes forward to reconcile him to us. Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel that God as our Maker supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessing - and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ." *Inst.* 1.2.1 (40).

persuaded that God is "the fountain of every good" and that he sustains, regulates, preserves and rules mankind, Calvin can also add the following statement within the context of providence:

For until men recognise that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him - they will never yield him willing service.¹³

That this concept of God's goodness and the parallel concept of his fatherly care is a recurrent theme in the context of his discussion on divine providence within *Inst.* 1.2¹⁴ would suggest the possibility that Calvin perceives God's Fatherhood as the paradigm for his exposition of divine providence.¹⁵

Calvin also indicates the very practical nature not only of the *duplex cognitio Dei* but, by implication, the doctrine of divine providence. He insists in his summary of divine providence above that it is all for "us".¹⁶ This is an echo of his earlier insistence that whatever one may make of the *duplex cognitio Dei*, it is not sufficient merely to say that "there is a God, but also

¹³ *Inst.* 1.2.1 (41).

¹⁴ "Rather, our knowledge should serve first to teach us fear and reverence: secondly, with it as our guide and teacher, we should learn to seek *every good* from him, and, having received it, to credit to his account." (41-42); "Again, you cannot behold him clearly unless you acknowledge him to be the fountainhead and source of *every good*." (42); "It thus recognises God because it knows that he governs all things; and trusts that he is its guide and protector, therefore giving itself over completely to trust in him. Because it understands him to be the Author of *every good*... Because it is persuaded that he is good and merciful... Because it acknowledges him as Lord and *Father*, the pious mind also deems it meet and right to observe his authority in all things..." (42); "Besides this mind restrains itself from sinning, not out of dread of punishment alone; but, because it loves and reveres God as *Father*, it worships and adores him as Lord." (43). [Italics for emphasis, mine].

¹⁵ That this is a positive reality is evident from its recurrence in *Inst.* 1.16-18. For example, on six occasions the phrase, "fatherly favour", or something close to it, is used in these chapters as an alternative description of providence: "fatherly favour", 1.16.1 (198); "fatherly favour", 1.16.2 (199); "fatherly favour", 1.16.5 (204); "fatherly hand", 1.16.7 (206); "fatherly favour" 1.17.1 (211); "fatherly care", 1.17.6 (219).

¹⁶ Note the emphasis on "us" in the sentence, "God as our Maker supports us..., governs us..., nourishes us..., and attends us...", *Inst.* 1.2.1 (40).

grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know him".¹⁷ It would seem then that, for Calvin, the doctrine of divine providence is an instance of just such an advantage in knowing the true God.¹⁸ Indeed, as he will later affirm, "ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it".¹⁹

Calvin goes on to emphasise that there cannot be said to be any proper knowledge of God the Creator without also the proper knowledge of his providence. Defining in no uncertain terms what he considers to be the true view of divine providence, viz., the universality and particularity of God's providence, he introduces what he considers to be the correct concept of the God of providence by furnishing his readers with a summary of God's attributes, highlighting especially his power, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, justice and mercy.²⁰

He continues by indicating what is, for him, one particular example of a false concept of God, viz., the concept of the "idle God" held by Epicurus:

What is God? Men who pose this question are merely toying with idle

¹⁷ *Inst.* 1.2.1 (39).

¹⁸ Note, for instance, the following statement to the same effect within *Inst.* 1.2.1 (40): "For until men recognise that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him - they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him". As shall be evident in the rest of this chapter, the practical purpose of the knowledge of God the Creator is often bound up with Calvin's exposition of divine providence.

¹⁹ *Inst.* 1.17.11 (225). Not surprisingly, Calvin actually devotes a whole section to the practical nature of the doctrine of divine providence, viz., *Inst.* 1.17, under the head, "How we may apply this doctrine to our greatest benefit". For Calvin, as will be evident in this study, divine providence was not a question of theological or philosophical speculation.

²⁰ *Inst.* 1.2.1 (40-41): "Moreover, although our mind cannot apprehend God without rendering some honour to him, it will not suffice simply to hold that there is One whom all ought to honour and adore, unless we are also persuaded that he is the fountain of every good, and that we must seek nothing elsewhere than in him. This I take to mean that not only does he sustain this universe (as he once founded it) by his boundless might, regulate it by his wisdom, preserve it by his goodness, and especially rule mankind by his righteousness and judgement, bear with it in his mercy, watch over it by his protection; but also that no drop will be found either of wisdom and light, or of righteousness or power or rectitude, or of genuine truth, which does not flow from him, and of which he is not the cause."

speculation. It is more important for us to know of what sort he is and what is consistent with his nature. What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness? What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?²¹

That Calvin should mention Epicurus so early in the *Institutes* is not surprising, for it is the Epicurean, more than anyone else, who denied divine providence. Calvin leaves his readers in no doubt with regards to his attitude towards the Epicureans especially in *Inst.* 1.16-18. If in *Inst.* 1.2, he merely mentioned the teaching of Epicurus once, in *Inst.* 1.16-18, he dwells on it.²² Of course, there were others who were guilty of denying the biblical teaching concerning the God of providence.²³ But it would seem that whenever divine providence is mentioned in his writings, he reserves his most scathing criticisms for the Epicurean.²⁴ It is likely, too, that this early introduction of Epicurus hints at what he deems to be especially under attack in his day when it comes to the knowledge of God the Creator: precisely that of his providence.

Of equal significance is his concern to draw the scholastic distinction

²¹ *Inst.* 1.2.2 (41).

²² "And truly God claims, and would have us grant him, omnipotence - not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists imagine..." *Inst.* 1.16.3 (200); "At the outset, then, let my readers grasp that providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth..." 1.16.4 (201); "I say nothing of the Epicureans (a pestilence that has always filled the world) who imagine that God is idle and indolent..." 1.16.4 (202); "Surely he does not conjure up a God who reposes idly in a watchtower..." 1.16.8 (208). It should be noted that Calvin charges the "sophists" and "others just as foolish" for similarly teaching an "idle" god who has cast aside the care of this world. See *Inst.* 1.16.3 (200) and 1.16.4 (202) respectively.

²³ Calvin mentions specific groups like the "Stoics", *Inst.* 1.16.8 (207) and the "Sophists", 1.16.3 (200), 1.17.2 (214), apart from the Epicureans, 1.16.4 (202). But he also used general terms to describe them and others who do not subscribe to the biblical doctrine of divine providence: "philosophers", 1.16.1 (198), 1.16.3 (200); "profane" or "impious" men, 1.16.1 (197), 1.17.3 (215); "vain men", 1.17.12 (225); "distracted men", 1.17.6 (218); "fools", 1.17.4 (216); and even "dogs", 1.17.2 (212).

²⁴ Reardon has observed that "during his whole life Calvin would return to his attack on the Epicureans", and supports his observation by citing instances of such an attack in Calvin's commentaries and polemical writings. See, Reardon, *ibid*, 519-520.

between the knowledge of the quiddity (*quid*) and the knowledge of the quality (*qualis*) of God.²⁵ This is a crucial distinction for throughout his discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator, Calvin uses it to circumscribe what he sees to be the true concept of God. On the one hand, it is a device he uses to avoid mere speculation about the essence of God, as was the fault with the philosophers of his day; on the other hand, it is used to determine what he believes to be clearly a Scriptural concept of God. As before, the practical nature of this knowledge is never far from his mind: "What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?"²⁶ It would seem that the integration of providence into his treatment of the *duplex cognitio Dei* is due, in part, to his overriding desire to show that the true knowledge of God as Creator is a very practical matter. Of the two doctrines arising from the knowledge of God the creator, viz., creation and providence, it is the latter which exhibits most clearly the practical purpose of that knowledge. In emphasising divine providence, Calvin was maintaining that God continues to have dealings with his creation and his creatures. If God was simply "idle", as Epicurus maintained, even given the fact he was Creator, there would have been no practical purpose for man to know him at all since God has no more dealings with man and *vice versa*.

Calvin ends this second chapter of the *Institutes* with a reminder of all the elements he has already mentioned above: that the knowledge of the

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas makes a similar distinction: "Moreover, our intellect cannot reach beyond sensible objects to perceive the divine essence... And hence we cannot know the entire power of God... and consequently, neither can we perceive his essence. But because God's effects depend on their cause, we can be led by them to know he exists, and to know about him what necessarily befits him... And hence we know about him the relationship of himself to creatures..." See, ST 1.12.12, 89

²⁶ Compare, for example, the following statements: "Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself." *Inst.* 1.5.9 (62); or, "Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us; so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation." *Inst.* 1.10.2 (97), cf. *Inst.* 3.2.6 (549). Note Calvin's eschewing of all speculation concerning the essence of God, his emphasis on the practical nature of the true knowledge of God, and the Scriptural support he cites for the particular concept of God he presents in these sections.

true God must certainly embrace the knowledge of his providence; that this knowledge must not be based upon speculation, but upon what God has revealed concerning himself in the Scriptures, not least, that of His Fatherhood; and that this knowledge has a practical purpose. Calvin considers these elements as essentially constituting what he terms "the pious mind".²⁷ The following statement could not have been more emphatic:

...the pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God. And it does not attach to him whatever it pleases, but is content to hold him to be as he manifests himself; furthermore, the mind always exercises the utmost diligence and care not to wander astray, or rashly and boldly to go beyond his will. It thus recognises God because it knows that he governs all things; and trusts that he is its guide and protector, therefore giving itself over completely to trust in him. Because it understands him to be the Author of every good, if anything oppresses, if anything is lacking, immediately it betakes itself to his protection, waiting for help from him. Because it is persuaded that he is good and merciful, it reposes in him with perfect trust, and doubts not that in his loving-kindness a remedy will be provided for all its ills. Because it acknowledges him as Lord and Father, the pious mind also deems it meet and right to observe his authority in all things, reverence his majesty, take care to advance his glory, and obey his commandments.²⁸

The concept of piety plays a key role in Calvin's thinking on the

²⁷ Calvin has already introduced the necessity of "piety" if God is to be known in *Inst.* 1.2.1 (39): "Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety". He has also defined it as "that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces" and not insignificantly, links it with a recognition of "his fatherly care", *Inst.* 1.2.1 (41). Here, for the first time in his *Institutes*, he shows how "piety" is related to one's conception of God which certainly includes the knowledge of his providence as well ("knowledge of his benefits...").

²⁸ *Inst.* 1.2.2 (42).

knowledge of God.²⁹ It recurs in the *Institutes* with great frequency.³⁰ In Book 1, however, it often occurs as a correlate of Calvin's concept of God and, not insignificantly, with his doctrine of divine providence.³¹ Closely related to Calvin's emphasis on piety is his concept of faith.³² As shall be evident in a subsequent chapter, Calvin's concept of faith provides us with an important clue as to what we may know concerning the God of providence.

The above consideration of *Inst.* 1.1-2, therefore, indicates what is clearly the central issue in Calvin's exposition of divine providence: it is the concept of God. That he should constantly maintain the close connection between creation and providence is due entirely to what he considers to be the Scriptural presentation of God the Creator as opposed to the speculative concept of God presented by, for example, Epicurus. However, all this is preliminary. Calvin does not cite, as he later would in the *locus classicus* and

²⁹ That Calvin considered the concept of piety as of primary importance is evident by what he himself deems to be the purpose of the *Institutes*: "My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness." See his *Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France* in his 1559 *Institutes* (9). This has also been highlighted variously, for instance, by Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 135-147; Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 24-31; Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 22-30.

³⁰ A glance at the subject index under "Piety" in Battles' edition of the 1559 *Institutes* (1687-1688) is sufficient proof of this.

³¹ For instance, when remarking upon David's statement in Psa 14:1 and Psa 53:1, concerning ungodly men and fools, Calvin wrote: "But to render their madness more detestable, David represents them as flatly denying God's existence; not that they deprive him of his being, but because, in despoiling him of his judgment and providence, they shut him up idle in heaven. Now, there is nothing less in accord with God's nature than for him to cast off the government of the universe and abandon it to fortune...", *Inst.* 1.4.2 (48). Not surprisingly, Calvin considers the Epicureans, who deny divine providence altogether, as among "crass despisers of piety", *Inst.* 1.5.12 (65-66).

³² Note the language of "faith": "trusts", "giving itself over completely to trust in him", "betakes itself to his protection", "waiting for help", "persuaded", "reposes", and "doubts not". Compare, for instance, the following: "For this reason, the apostle, in that very passage where he calls the worlds the images of things invisible, adds that through faith we understand that they have been fashioned by God's word [Heb. 11:3]. He means by this that the invisible divinity is made manifest in such spectacles, but that we have not the eyes to see this unless they be illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith." *Inst.* 1.5.14 (68); "But faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver - not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow." *Inst.* 1.16.1 (197-198).

the chapters preceding it, the Scriptural evidence for the particular concept of the God of providence he has summarised here. Neither does he elaborate. He merely states in embryonic form, but no less emphatically, what characterises the God of providence.

Having given such emphasis to the close connection between the *duplex cognitio Dei* and providence in his thought, it is not surprising that Calvin should repeat it whenever he discusses the *duplex cognitio Dei* in the rest of Book 1. In *Inst.* 1.6.1, when discussing the knowledge of God possessed by Adam, Noah, Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs, he states unequivocally that this must certainly have been a *duplex cognitio Dei*.³³ He then reiterates that the same God who "founded" the universe now "governs" it.³⁴

Similarly, when referring to the purpose of Scripture in revealing the true God, he emphasises the same link between the *duplex cognitio Dei* and providence while eschewing, in the same breath, what he calls "the throng of false gods".³⁵ Again, while reminding his readers that he is not as yet dealing with the knowledge of God the Redeemer he reiterates the close connection between the *duplex cognitio Dei* and providence:

We, however, are still concerned with that knowledge which stops at the creation of the world, and does not mount up to Christ the Mediator. But even if it shall be worthwhile a little later to cite certain passages from the New Testament, in which the power of God the

³³ "For, that they might pass from death to life, it was necessary to recognise God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer, for undoubtedly they arrived at both from the Word." See, *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70).

³⁴ "First in order came that kind of knowledge by which one is permitted to grasp who that God is who founded and governs the universe. Then that other inner knowledge was added, which alone quickens dead souls, whereby God is known not only as the Founder of the universe and the sole Author and Ruler of all that is made, but also in the person of the Mediator as Redeemer." *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70-71).

³⁵ "Yet I repeat once more: besides the specific doctrine of faith and repentance that sets forth Christ as Mediator, Scripture adorns with unmistakable marks and tokens the one true God, in that he has created and governs the universe, in order that he may not be mixed up with the throng of false gods." *Inst.* 1.6.2 (72).

Creator and of his providence in the preservation of the primal nature are proved, yet I wish to warn my readers what I now intend to do, lest they overleap the limits set for them. Finally, at present let it be enough to grasp how God, the Maker of heaven and earth, governs the universe founded by him.³⁶

As before, he repeats his dependence upon the Scripture (in this case, "the New Testament") for his particular concept of God and divine providence and warns of the necessity to keep within certain "limits" in expounding the doctrine of God the Creator.³⁷

In fact, Calvin maintains the same emphases beyond Book 1 whenever he touches upon the *duplex cognitio Dei*. In *Inst.* 2.6.1, he still suggests:

Therefore, since we have fallen from life into death, the whole knowledge of God the Creator that we have discussed would be useless unless faith also followed, setting forth for us God our Father in Christ. The natural order was that the frame of the universe should be the school in which we were to learn piety, and from it pass over to eternal life and perfect felicity... This magnificent theatre of heaven and earth, crammed with innumerable miracles, Paul calls the "wisdom of God." Contemplating it, we ought in wisdom to have known God. But because we have profited so little by it, he calls us to the faith of Christ, which, because it appears foolish, the unbelievers despise.³⁸

³⁶ *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97).

³⁷ Not to be missed is Calvin's intention in *Inst.* 1.10 to compare the knowledge of God as revealed in his works and in his Word: "But now it is worth-while to ponder whether the Lord represents himself to us in Scripture as we previously saw him delineate himself in his works." *Inst.* 1.10.1 (96). As shall be evident, this is a crucial chapter in our discussion. More will be said about this in the next chapter of this study.

³⁸ *Inst.* 2.6.1 (341).

Passing over other matters in the above passage, it cannot be denied that Calvin was still holding firmly to the link he has established between the *duplex cognitio Dei* and divine providence. If not for the fall of Adam, man would naturally have come to know God ("we ought to have known God") by observing His creation and providence ("This magnificent theatre of heaven and earth, crammed with innumerable miracles").

So here in these first two chapters, Calvin already indicates his intention in Book 1. In his thought, he sees a link between the *duplex cognitio* and, more especially, the *duplex cognitio Dei* and divine providence. As such, he sees no difficulty in integrating the subject of providence into his exposition of the *duplex cognitio Dei* in Book 1. What constitutes that link is his particular concept of God the Creator which he, unashamedly, attributes to the Scripture as opposed to, say, the Epicurean who merely speculates about the "idle" God. He insists that it is only this Scriptural concept of the God of providence which can serve a practical purpose. He further hints at the concept of God's Fatherhood as a most suitable paradigm for his exposition of divine providence. In the process, he also indicates the approach he is adopting throughout his exposition of the *duplex cognitio Dei* in Book 1: whenever God the Creator or creation is dealt with, the doctrine of providence is inferred. That this is so can be further demonstrated by an examination of his discussion of providence in Chapters 3-15 of Book 1.

II. **INST. 1:3-15: FURTHER DISCUSSION OF THE *DUPLEX COGNITIO DEI* AND PROVIDENCE**

As the evidence will demonstrate, Calvin did not abandon his introductory observations on the relationship between the knowledge of God the Creator and providence. Rather, he draws attention to them time and again in Chapters 3-15. For instance, in *Inst.* 1.4, Calvin writes:

Now, there is nothing less in accord with God's nature than for him to cast off the government of the universe and abandon it to fortune, and

to be blind to the wicked deeds of men, so that they may just
unpunished.³⁹

He insists that to admit God as Creator but to deny His providence is not consistent with God's nature. He maintains that the God revealed in Scripture is simply not like that. He also eschews the idea of fortune⁴⁰ because effectively it "denies that there is a God".⁴¹

From this point on, he never ceases to return to that prominent theme time and again. For example, from sections 2 to 11 of *Inst.* 1.5, Calvin does not once fail to keep creation and providence together. It could be said that, apart from *Inst.* 1.16-18, *Inst.* 1.5.2-11 probably represent one of the most extended treatments of divine providence in the *Institutes*.

Enumerating the many wonders of creation and how they all witness not merely to the existence of God, but also, to his wisdom, Calvin could not avoid the correlative idea of providence. Contemplation of creation should lead us to an admiration of the Artificer, and beyond that, to God's providence.⁴² Man, the loftiest not only of all of God's creatures but of the whole creation, contains within himself enough miracles to occupy our minds and to praise God.⁴³ Indeed,

[Men] feel in many wonderful ways that God works in them; they are

³⁹ *Inst.* 1.4.2 (48).

⁴⁰ He deals with the idea of fortune in greater detail in *Inst.* 1.16.2 ("There is no such thing as fortune or chance"); 1.16.6 ("God's providence especially relates to men"); 1.16.8-9 ("Discussion of fortune, chance, and seeming contingency in events"); 1.17.10 ("Without certainty about God's providence life would be unbearable").

⁴¹ *Inst.* 1.4.2 (48).

⁴² "Yet ignorance of them prevents no one from seeing more than enough of God's workmanship in his creation to lead him to break forth in admiration of the Artificer. To be sure, there is no need of art and of more exacting toil in order to investigate the motion of the stars, to determine their assigned stations, to measure their intervals, to note their properties. As God's providence shows itself more explicitly when one observes these, so the mind must rise to a higher level." *Inst.* 1.5.2 (53).

⁴³ *Inst.* 1.5.3 (54).

also taught, by the very use of these things, what a great variety of gifts they possess from his liberality. They are compelled to know - whether they will or not - that these are the signs of divinity: yet they conceal them within.⁴⁴

Again, he castigates Epicurus and his followers for what he terms as their shameless "war against God", and especially, the God of providence.⁴⁵ While engaged in a rhetorical fashion with how Aristotle confused God with his creature, Calvin could not avoid mentioning the necessity of believing in the God of creation and providence:

Now what reason would there be to believe that man is divine and not to recognize his Creator? Shall we, indeed, distinguish between right and wrong by that judgment which has been imparted to us, yet will there be no judge in heaven? Will there remain for us even in sleep some remnant of intelligence, yet will no God keep watch in governing the world?⁴⁶

From these, Calvin goes on to discuss the two kinds of work by which God's power⁴⁷ is set forth clearly for mankind to observe. One involves the creator's lordship over all of his creation; the other involves God's government and judgment in relation especially to mankind.⁴⁸ In *Inst.* 1.5.6-7, Calvin not only reiterates what he has mentioned before in *Inst.* 1.2, but adds

⁴⁴ *Inst.* 1.5.4 (55). Note that this recalls what Calvin has already mentioned in *Inst.* 1.1.1 (35) in the context of the *duplex cognitio*.

⁴⁵ "Let Epicurus answer what concourse of atoms cooks food and drink, turns part of it into excrement, part into blood, and begets such industry in the several members to carry out their tasks, as if so many souls ruled one body by common counsel!" *Inst.* 1.5.4 (56).

⁴⁶ *Inst.* 1.5.5 (57).

⁴⁷ God's "power" is one quality Calvin often employs in relation to divine providence. Here he speaks of God's "might", of his "power" which sustains this "infinite mass". Speaking of thunder and lightning, storms, the uncertainty of the sea he writes: "Belonging to this theme are praises of God's power from the testimonies of nature...", *Inst.* 1.5.6 (59).

⁴⁸ See *Inst.* 1.5.6 (58-59) and 1.5.7 (59-60) respectively.

to it. For example, he takes for granted the inevitability of providence proceeding from creation.⁴⁹ He goes on to deal more specifically with an aspect of providence he has not mentioned in any detail before, namely, God's providence as seen in the administration of human society.⁵⁰

Calvin mentions, as well, a feature of divine providence which he has already introduced earlier, in these sections of *Inst.* 1.5: that of God's fatherly kindness in relation to divine providence. Quoting Psalm 107, Calvin concludes thus:

By setting forth examples of this sort, the prophet shows that what are thought to be chance occurrences are just so many proofs of heavenly providence, especially of fatherly kindness.⁵¹

He again eschews the idea of "fortune":

In fact, with regard to those events which daily take place outside the ordinary course of nature, how many of us do not reckon that men are whirled and twisted about by blindly indiscriminate fortune, rather than governed by God's providence?⁵²

He, then, begins *Inst.* 1.6 with a reminder of the *duplex cognitio Dei*

⁴⁹ "Furthermore, if the cause is sought by which he was led once to create all these things, and is now moved to preserve them, we shall find that it is his goodness alone." *Inst.* 1.5.6 (59). Note the "goodness" of God, an attribute Calvin has employed before in relation to divine providence.

⁵⁰ "For in administering human society he so tempers his providence that, although kindly and beneficent toward all in numberless ways, he still by open and daily indications declares clemency to the godly and his severity to the wicked and criminal." *Inst.* 1.5.7 (60).

⁵¹ *Inst.* 1.5.8 (60). Compare, for example, the following phrases used in relation with divine providence as well: "fatherly kindness", 1.5.7 (60); "fatherly goodness", 1.10.1 (96-97); "fatherly love", 1.14.2 (161-162); "fatherly solicitude", 1.14.22 (182).

⁵² *Inst.* 1.5.11 (63-64). Calvin goes on to add in the same paragraph: "It is the same where the governance of human affairs shows providence so manifestly that we cannot deny it; yet we profit no more by it than if we believed that all things were turned topsy-turvy by the heedless will of fortune - so great is our inclination toward vanity and error!" (64).

which he has delineated in *Inst.* 1.2 and shows how this is, indeed, the Scriptural approach to a true knowledge of God.⁵³ And, as we have seen, he is at pains to keep creation and providence together within his discussion of the *duplex cognitio Dei*.⁵⁴ Calvin, then, goes on to deal with a particular example of God's providence which is not mentioned at all in *Inst.* 1.16-18, for that matter, elsewhere in the *Institutes*, namely, the Holy Scriptures.⁵⁵ Then, tracing how God providentially preserved the Scriptures, Calvin surmises:

The law of Moses was wonderfully preserved by heavenly providence rather than by human effort.⁵⁶

It is clear, therefore, that Calvin was dealing here with an example of God's providence which he does not refer to at all in *Inst.* 1.16-18. The fact that he does should caution us against limiting his treatment of divine providence to just the *locus classicus*. This is not to deny the importance of the *locus classicus*. But it does indicate that any careful reading of Calvin on divine providence cannot be confined to the *locus classicus* alone, even when

⁵³ "There is no doubt that Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the rest of the patriarchs with this assistance [i.e., God's Word] penetrated to the intimate knowledge of him that in a way distinguished them from unbelievers. I am not yet speaking of the proper doctrine of faith whereby they have been illumined unto the hope of eternal life. For, that they might pass from death to life, it was necessary to recognize God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer, for undoubtedly they arrived at both from the Word." *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70).

⁵⁴ *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70). The words, "govern" and "governing", appear numerous times in *Inst.* 1.2-15 in relation to divine providence and are key words in Calvin's usage.

⁵⁵ "What wonderful confirmation ensues when, with keener study, we ponder the economy of the divine wisdom, so well ordered and disposed; the completely heavenly character of its doctrine, savoring of nothing earthly; the beautiful agreement of all the parts with one another - as well as such other qualities as can gain majesty for the writings. But our hearts are more firmly grounded when we reflect that we are captivated with admiration for Scripture more by grandeur of subjects than by grace of language. For it was also not without God's extraordinary providence that the sublime mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven came to be expressed largely in mean and lowly words, lest, if they had been adorned with more shining eloquence, the impious would scoffingly have claimed that its power is in the realm of eloquence alone." *Inst.* 1.8.1 (82).

⁵⁶ *Inst.* 1.8.9 (88), cf. 1.8.10 (89-90).

considered from within the *Institutes* itself.⁵⁷

As we have already observed, Calvin reminds his readers again of his approach in employing the *duplex cognitio Dei* in his treatment of the knowledge of God, and that, by keeping together creation and providence.⁵⁸ Even when dwelling on the import of two of the names of God, "Jehovah" and "Elohim", Calvin could not ignore the significance of providence implied in those names. He concludes, having quoted numerous Scripture texts:

Certainly these three things are especially necessary for us to know: mercy, on which alone the salvation of us all rests; judgment, which is daily exercised against wrongdoers, and in even greater severity awaits them to their everlasting ruin; justice, whereby believers are preserved, and are most tenderly nourished.⁵⁹

Interestingly enough, it is after having mentioned creation and providence together in the context of the *duplex cognitio Dei* for the third and last time in Book 1, that Calvin suddenly breaks off from mentioning providence again.⁶⁰ An examination of the next two chapters, *Inst.* 1.11-12 evidently supports that impression since providence is not dealt with at all in them.⁶¹ And yet, it is a well-known fact that Calvin did return to the subject of providence again in *Inst.* 1.16-18, the *locus classicus*. In fact, he gave a hint

⁵⁷ Schreiner, in *The Theater of His Glory*, has similarly demonstrated that any fresh treatment of divine providence in Calvin's thought must move beyond *Inst.* 1.16-18. This is because divine providence is so inextricably intertwined with other aspects of Calvin's thought, not least, the created orders of the angels, the human soul and body, the cosmos and natural order. Not surprisingly, therefore, divine providence is treated in all four books of the *Institutes*.

⁵⁸ *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97). See, also, the relevant comments on pages 57-58 of this chapter.

⁵⁹ *Inst.* 1.10.2 (98).

⁶⁰ He already implied as much when he wrote in the previous section this: "Finally, at present let it be enough to grasp how God the Maker of heaven and earth, governs the universe founded by him." *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97).

⁶¹ As the next chapter of this study will reveal, Calvin's major concern in these two chapters relates to Roman Catholic idolatry. The purpose of their inclusion in Book 1 will be evident in the next chapter of this study.

that he would be returning to the subject in *Inst.* 1.10.1, when he wrote:

But even if it shall be worthwhile a little later to cite certain passages from the New Testament, in which the power of God the Creator and of his providence in the preservation of the primal nature are proved, yet I wish to warn my readers what I now intend to do...⁶²

Thus, the interruption in his discussion of providence was meant only to be temporary.⁶³

Indeed, Calvin already hinted at a much earlier stage that both creation and providence are not far from his mind throughout Chapters 3-10 of Book 1. For instance, in *Inst.* 1.5.6, while discussing how God the Creator reveals his lordship over his creation, he writes:

Belonging to this theme are the praises of God's power from the testimonies of nature... especially indeed in The Book of Job and in Isaiah. These I now intentionally pass over, for they will find a more appropriate place where I shall discuss from the Scriptures the creation of the universe.⁶⁴

This is, undoubtedly, a reference to his treatment of creation in Book 1, Chapter 14. Similarly, when discussing the purpose of God's power being displayed in his works and in mankind in *Inst.* 1.5.10, he adds:

For even though David justly complains that unbelievers are foolish because they do not ponder the deep designs of God in the governance of mankind [Ps 92:5-6], yet what he says elsewhere is

⁶² *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97). Battles reminds us, and rightly so, that Calvin was already looking forward to *Inst.* 1.16-18 in the above statement. See Note 3 of *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97).

⁶³ The purpose of this "temporary" omission of creation and providence will be discussed in the next chapter of this study.

⁶⁴ *Inst.* 1.5.6 (59).

very true: that God's wonderful wisdom here abounds more than the hairs of our head [cf. Ps 40:12]. But because this argument is to be treated more amply below, I now pass over it.⁶⁵

Calvin is suggesting that he is merely introducing the argument here, but he is going to develop that argument in another part of his *Institutes*, namely, *Inst.* 1.16.6-9. It seems clear, therefore, that Calvin is not only reminding his readers of the close connection between creation and providence he has maintained thus far, but he is also pointing them forward to the chapters on creation and providence in Book 1, showing thereby that these are integral to his whole discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator.

Indeed, while he seems to have dealt only incidentally with providence in *Inst.* 1.13, whatever he has to say of it is no mere appendage to his treatment of the Trinity. It should be recognised, for instance, that providence is no less prominent in this than in the earlier chapters we have looked at thus far. This is evident from the many direct references to the subject of divine providence.⁶⁶ Secondly, it should be noted that Calvin's use of Scriptural evidence, time and again, to show the participation of the Son and the Spirit with the Father in creation and providence is not merely for the purpose of proving the deity of both the Son and the Spirit. Calvin was impressing upon his readers the particular God-concept he wishes them to recognise not only for his treatment of creation, but also, for his treatment of providence.⁶⁷ Not to be overlooked is also Calvin's treatment of the "Angel of Yahweh" motif since, as we shall see, this has a direct bearing not merely on Calvin's Christology but also his doctrine of providence.⁶⁸ Since these will be

⁶⁵ *Inst.* 1.5.10 (63).

⁶⁶ Notice the amount of space given to providence in this chapter: *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129-130), 1.13.8 (130-131), 1.13.10 (132-134), 1.13.11 (134-135), 1.13.12 (135-136), 1.13.13 (138), 1.13.14 (138-139), 1.13.15 (139-140), 1.13.18 (142-143), 1.13.22 (148), 1.13.24 (152-153).

⁶⁷ Of particular significance, in this regard, are the sections under the heads, "The eternal deity of the Son" (sections 7-13), and "The eternal deity of the Spirit" (sections 14-15).

⁶⁸ *Inst.* 1.13.10 (132-134); cf. *Inst.* 1.14.6 (166-167), 1.14.9 (170). Closely related to this is Calvin's treatment of the role of angels in providence, especially in *Inst.* 1.14.9-12, where he

dealt with in a subsequent chapter,⁶⁹ we shall presently postpone discussion of them.

An examination of *Inst.* 1.14-15, where Calvin deals directly with the doctrine of creation, only serves to confirm what has been said thus far of the prominence of providence in Book 1 and the logical link between creation and providence Calvin was so much at pains to maintain. That Calvin's primary concern in these chapters remains the same as in preceding chapters, viz., the knowledge of God the Creator as represented in the Scriptures, is clear from his introductory statement to these two chapters on creation.⁷⁰ He leaves no place for doubt when he insists that this "invisible God, whose wisdom, power, and righteousness are incomprehensible" cannot be known "unless Scripture guides us."⁷¹ That he relied upon the first book of the Bible for his doctrine of creation he clearly evinced,⁷² though he does not go into the same detailed argument for the validity of the Scriptural representation of creation over and against other views as in his *Commentary on Genesis*.⁷³

is quick to remind his readers that by virtue of Christ's Lordship over the angels, the latter are but only instruments in the dispensation of God's providence, while Christ is the actual Dispenser himself.

⁶⁹ Chapter 6 of this study will be devoted to an examination of the Trinitarian rubric within which Calvin expounded his doctrine of providence.

⁷⁰ "Isaiah rightly charges the worshippers of false gods with obtuseness, because they have not learned from the foundations of the earth and the circle of the heavens who is the true God [Isa 40:21; cf. V 22; see Comm.]. Despite this, such is the slowness and dullness of our wit that, to prevent believers from deserting to the fabrications of the heathen, we must depict the true God more distinctly than they do. Since the notion of God as the mind of the universe (in the philosophers' eyes, a most acceptable description) is ephemeral, it is important for us to know him more intimately, lest we always waver in doubt. Therefore it was his will that the history of Creation be made manifest, in order that the faith of the church, resting upon this, might seek no other God but him who was put forth by Moses as the Maker and Founder of the universe." *Inst.* 1.14.1 (159-160).

⁷¹ *Inst.* 1.14.1 (160-161).

⁷² Note his constant reference to Moses: "put forth by Moses", "Moses' history as a mirror", *Inst.* 1.14.1 (160); "With the same intent Moses relates that God's work was completed...", "it will be clear that Moses was a sure witness and herald of the one God, the Creator", *Inst.* 1.14.2 (161-162).

⁷³ See especially "Calvin's Dedication" and "Argument" in his *Commentary on Genesis*.

What is of significance for the present purpose is that though Calvin's main interest is with creation in these two chapters, providence is never far from his mind. The Scriptural record of the creation of the universe in six days, he says, is to turn man's mind to a contemplation of "God's fatherly love toward mankind, in that he did not create Adam until he had lavished upon the universe all manner of good things." In so doing, God assumes "the responsibility of a foreseeing and diligent father of the family" and "shows his wonderful goodness towards us."⁷⁴ God's fatherhood as the paradigm for divine providence which has been evident in the earlier chapters is thus reiterated by Calvin here.⁷⁵ So is the practical nature⁷⁶ of divine providence: "For if [God] had put him in an earth as yet sterile and empty, if he had given him life before light, he would have seemed to provide insufficient for his welfare."⁷⁷ This is especially evident, when in summing up the spiritual lessons of creation, Calvin wrote at length on it:

Indeed, as I pointed out a little before, God himself has shown by the order of Creation that he created all things for man's sake. For it is not without significance that he divided the making of the

Calvin admits as much when he writes: "But since it is not my purpose to recount the creation of the universe... it is better, as I have already warned my readers, to seek a fuller understanding of this passage from Moses and those others who have faithfully and diligently recorded the narrative of Creation." *Inst.* 1.14.20 (180).

⁷⁴ *Inst.* 1.14.2 (161-162).

⁷⁵ Note also the same emphasis in the lengthy quotation below from *Inst.* 1.14.22 (181-182).

⁷⁶ Warfield has suggested: "That [Calvin] passes over the divine Purpose or decree at this point, though it would logically claim our attention before its execution in creation and providence, is only another indication of the intensely practical spirit of Calvin and the simplicity of his method in this work. He carries his readers at once over from what God is to what God does... The practical end which has determined this sequence of topics governs also the manner in which the subject of creation, now taken up (chaps. xiv-xv), is dealt with. There is no discussion of it from a formal point of view: the treatment is wholly material and is devoted rather to the nature of the created universe than to the mode of Divine activity in creating it." See Warfield, *Calvin's Doctrine of Creation*, 287.

⁷⁷ *Inst.* 1.14.2 (162).

universe into six days [Gen 1:31], even though it would have been no more difficult for him to have completed in one moment the whole work together in all its details than to arrive at its completion gradually by a progression of this sort. But he willed to commend his providence and fatherly solicitude toward us in that, before he fashioned man, he prepared everything he foresaw would be useful and salutary for him. How great ingratitude would it be now to doubt whether this most gracious Father has us in his care, who we see was concerned for us even before we were born! How impious would it be to tremble for fear that his kindness might at any time fail us in our need, when we see that it was shown, with the greatest abundance of every good thing, when we were yet unborn! Besides, from Moses we hear that, through His liberality, all things on earth are subject to us [Gen 1:28; 9:2]. It is certain that he did not do this to mock us with the empty title to a gift. Therefore nothing that is needful for our welfare will ever be lacking to us.⁷⁸

In this regard, it is interesting that Calvin is quick to draw attention to the purpose for which God created the angels, namely, "that angels are dispensers and administrators of God's benevolence toward us".⁷⁹ He does not so much deal with their creation though that was one half of his expressed purpose in *Inst.* 1.14.4-12.⁸⁰ Rather, Calvin's emphasis falls unmistakably on what he has already established above: that angels are celestial spirits whose ministry and service God uses to carry out all things he has decreed, not least, for the sake of man.⁸¹ In examining the

⁷⁸ *Inst.* 1.14.22 (181-182).

⁷⁹ *Inst.* 1.14.6 (166). Note the title given to this section which emphasises the same truth: "The angels as protectors and helpers of believers".

⁸⁰ This section of *Inst.* 1.14 has been headed as "Creation and functions of angels".

⁸¹ *Inst.* 1.14.5 (165). Cf. *Inst.* 1.14.9 (169): "Yet this point, which some restless men call in question, ought to be held certain: that angels are 'ministering spirits' [Heb 1:14], whose service God uses for the protection of his won, and through whom he both dispenses his benefits among men and also carries out his remaining works."

titles and names given to angels in Scripture, he similarly highlights this fact.⁸² He then cites numerous examples from Scripture as to how God used angels providentially for his own people.⁸³ While it is true that God could easily dispense with the ministry of angels, he nevertheless “makes use of angels to comfort our weakness, that we may lack nothing at all that can raise up our minds to good hope, or confirm them in security”.⁸⁴ He then concludes his discussion of angels with the reminder of the practical import of all that has been said:

For this reason, [God] not only promises to take care of us, but tells us he has innumerable guardians whom he has bidden to look after our safety; that so long as we are hedged about by their defense and keeping, whatever perils may threaten, we have been placed beyond all chance of evil. I confess that we act wrongly when, after that simple promise of the protection of the one God, we still seek whence our help may come... But because the Lord, out of his immeasurable kindness and gentleness, wishes to remedy this fault of ours, we have no reason to disregard his great benefit.⁸⁵

It is very clear, therefore, that Calvin is concerned, even in his discussion of creation, not only with the knowledge of God the Creator *per se* but also with the knowledge of the God of providence and the very practical nature of precisely such a knowledge.

Calvin carries on in a similar vein when discussing the devil and his angels in *Inst.* 1.14.13-19. The primary emphasis, as before, does not fall

⁸² “Hence, likewise, this name has been applied to them because God employs them as intermediary messengers to manifest himself to men. The other names by which they are called have also been taken as for a like reason.” *Inst.* 1.14.5 (165).

⁸³ See especially *Inst.* 1.14.6-7 (166-168).

⁸⁴ *Inst.* 1.14.11 (171).

⁸⁵ *Inst.* 1.14.11 (171).

upon the creation of the devil⁸⁶ so much as the place and role of the devil under the providence of God. Noting the devil's only desire is to war against God and his people, Calvin asserts in no uncertain terms that the devil "can do nothing unless God wills and assents to it" and that "with the bridle of his power God holds [the devil] bound and restrained" so that the devil "carries out only those things which have been divinely permitted to him; and so he obeys his Creator, whether he will or not, because he is compelled to yield him service wherever God impels him".⁸⁷ The practical purpose of all this is not lost to Calvin either. While, admittedly, God so governs their activity that they exercise believers in combat, yet, "God does not allow Satan to rule over the souls of believers, but gives over only the impious and unbelievers, whom he deigns not to regard as members of his own flock, to be governed by him". As such, believers may be distressed and wounded by the devil and his minions, but never completely overwhelmed nor vanquished by them.⁸⁸

The necessity of faith and of piety if we are to know the God of providence already highlighted in earlier chapters of Book 1 is repeatedly emphasised.⁸⁹ Not to be overlooked is his insistence throughout this

⁸⁶ Calvin does make casual mention of this in *Inst.* 1.14.16 (175), where he says that "the devil was created by God". Again, the devils "were when first created angels of God, but by degeneration they ruined themselves and became the instruments of ruin for others."

⁸⁷ *Inst.* 1.14.17 (175). Cf. *Inst.* 1.14.18 (176): "Now, because God bends the unclean spirits hither and thither at will..."

⁸⁸ *Inst.* 1.14.18 (177).

⁸⁹ "For even though our eyes, in whatever direction they may turn, are compelled to gaze upon God's works, yet we see how changeable is our attention, and how swiftly are dissipated any godly thoughts that may touch us. Here also, until human reason, is subjected to the obedience of faith and learns to cultivate that quiet to which the sanctification of the seventh day invites us, it grumbles, as if such proceedings were foreign to God's power." *Inst.* 1.14.2 (161); "For, as I have elsewhere said, although it is not the chief evidence for faith, yet it is the first evidence in the order of nature, to be mindful that wherever we cast our eyes, all things they meet are works of God, and at the same time to ponder with pious meditation to what end God created them. Therefore, that we may apprehend with true faith what it profits us to know of God, it is important for us to grasp first the history of the creation of the universe, as it has been set forth briefly by Moses..." *Inst.* 1.14.20 (179); "Therefore, to be brief, let all readers know that they have with true faith apprehended what it is for God to be Creator of heaven and earth, if they first of all follow the universal rule, not to pass over in

chapter of the clear distinction between the angels and the devils (both are God's creatures) and God the Creator. It is wrong, he says, to attribute divinity to angels.⁹⁰ In support of this, he cites Paul⁹¹ and the Nicene Creed.⁹² He then concludes by reminding his readers that they should not ascribe to angels the glory that belongs ultimately to God alone.⁹³ Similarly, Calvin maintains that the devil is a creature and, therefore, Mani is wrong to attribute divinity to him.⁹⁴ That Calvin may

ungrateful thoughtlessness or forgetfulness those conspicuous powers which God shows forth in his creatures." *Inst.* 1.14.21 (181). Calvin applies the same principle not only to the knowledge of God the Creator, but also to his discussion of angelology: "Nevertheless, we will take care to keep to the measure which the rule of godliness prescribes, that our readers may not, by speculating more deeply than expedient, wander away from the simplicity of faith." *Inst.* 1.14.3 (163). Indeed, it is a principle to be observed in the whole study of theology: "Not to take too long, let us remember here, as in all religious doctrine, that we ought to hold to one rule of modesty and sobriety: not to speak, or guess, or even seek to know, concerning obscure matters anything except what has been imparted to us by God's Word." *Inst.* 1.14.4 (164).

⁹⁰ "The pre-eminence of the angelic nature has so overwhelmed the minds of many that they think the angels wronged if, subjected to the authority of the one God, they are, as it were, forced into their own rank. For this reason, divinity was falsely attributed to them." *Inst.* 1.14.3 (162).

⁹¹ "Thus it happens that what belongs to God and Christ alone is transferred to [the angels]... And among those vices which we are today combating, there is hardly any more ancient. For it appears that Paul had a great struggle with certain persons who so elevated angels that they well-nigh degraded Christ to the same level. Hence he urges with great solicitude in the letter to the Colossians that not only is Christ to be preferred before all angels but that he is the author of all good things they have." *Inst.* 1.14.10 (170).

⁹² "It is probably for this purpose that in the Nicene Creed, where God is called the Creator of all things, invisible things are expressly mentioned." *Inst.* 1.14.3 (163).

⁹³ "For as God does not make them ministers of his power and goodness to share his glory with them, so he does not promise us his help through their ministry in order that we should divide our trust between them and him. Farewell, then, to that Platonic philosophy of seeking access to god through angels, and of worshipping them with intent to render God more approachable to us." *Inst.* 1.14.12 (172).

⁹⁴ "Also, Mani, with his sect, arose, fashioning for himself two principles: God and the devil. To God he attributed the origin of good things, but evil natures he referred to the devil as their author. If this madness held our minds ensnared, God's glory in the creation of the universe would not abide with him. For, since nothing is more characteristic of God than eternity and self-existence – that is, existence of himself, so to speak – do not those who attribute this to the devil in a sense adorn him with the title of divinity? Now where is God's omnipotence, if such sovereignty is conceded to the devil that he carries out whatever he wishes, against God's will and resistance?" *Inst.* 1.14.3 (162-163).

have in mind the Libertines here is clear not only from his reference to the Manichees but also from his overall approach to the subjects of the angels and the devil. In that controversy, as has been noted in Chapter 2 of this study, Calvin has inveighed against the Libertines for adopting the errors of Cerdon and, above all, the Manichees.⁹⁵ His treatment on the reality (or actuality) of angels in *Inst.* 1.14.9 recalls a similar treatment in the same treatise.⁹⁶ Similarly, his treatment of the devil and his angels in *Inst.* 1.14.13-19 finds its parallel as well in that treatise.⁹⁷ And, not insignificantly, Calvin had attacked the Libertines because he understood that if they were allowed to go unchallenged, their errors would undermine the Scriptural doctrine of divine providence and, most crucially, the Scriptural representation of the God of providence.⁹⁸ It is no accident, therefore, that it was in the context of his discussion on providence in that treatise that Calvin highlighted the failure of the Libertines in this regard. Speaking of how the Libertines confounded what the Scripture says about the providence of God “by which he does everything”,⁹⁹ he noted the following:

...when the Libertines hear these passages, they rush to them heedlessly, and without thinking them through they conclude that

⁹⁵ See Chapter 2, pages 35-36 of this study. Of Cerdon, Calvin wrote: “To begin with there was a Cerdon who emphasised two principles, one which he called good, the other evil. He maintained that everything in the world came from the [good] one and shared its substance. In saying this he denied the resurrection, because he thought that everything that had come from the one returned to its origin. Thus he held that Jesus Christ had appeared and suffered only as a phantom.” Of Manichean theology, Calvin wrote: “Next they created two different gods: one the origin of good, the other the origin of evil.” See, *Against the Libertines*, 195 and 197 respectively.

⁹⁶ “Hence, when they posit a single spirit, they are supposing that angels are only inspirations or movements and not creatures possessing [their own] essence.” *Against the Libertines*, 231.

⁹⁷ For Calvin’s view of the devil and his angels, see *Against the Libertines*, 178, 235, 246-247. For the Libertines’ view, see *ibid*, 177-178, 198, 234-235, 245-246, 264, 302, 305, 314-315.

⁹⁸ See Chapter 2, pages 35-37 of this study.

⁹⁹ Calvin used this phrase “by which he does everything” in the chapters on providence, viz., Chapters 14-16, and showed how he differed from the Libertines in understanding that phrase. *Ibid*, 242, 250 and 254.

creatures no longer act for themselves. For not only do they thoroughly identify heaven and earth together, but also God and the devil.¹⁰⁰

Here, then, is further evidence that Calvin's treatment of the angels and the devil has a direct bearing upon his doctrine of divine providence,¹⁰¹ and the God-concept he employed in his discussion of the latter. It should also be noticed that Calvin was consciously addressing in *Inst.* 1.14 the very same matters he had already addressed in his controversial writings. This serves to confirm what have been established in Chapter 2 of this study, namely, that his controversial writings undoubtedly contributed to the final *schema* of Book 1 of his 1559 *Institutes*.

Two other aspects of Calvin's discussion here in *Inst.* 1.14 which has a bearing on his concept of the God of providence should also be noticed. Firstly, there is his treatment of Christ's headship over the angels.¹⁰² This is nothing more nor less than an extension of his discussion of the deity of Jesus Christ he has already established in the previous chapter,¹⁰³ and as noted earlier¹⁰⁴ it has important ramifications for Calvin's God-concept in his treatment of providence. Secondly, Calvin reminds his readers that his treatment of creation is not divorced from his discussion of the Trinity in the previous chapter. Referring to Moses' testimony of God the Creator in Genesis, he writes:

I pass over what I have already explained, that he there not only speaks of the bare essence of God, but also sets forth for us His

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 245.

¹⁰¹ Schreiner has similarly observed: "Calvin's angelology focused on the providential mission of angels. Not surprisingly, therefore, his discussions about angels reflect those themes central to his doctrine of providence." See *The Theater of His Glory*, 52.

¹⁰² *Inst.* 1.14.9 (170) and 1.14.10-11 (170-172) especially.

¹⁰³ *Inst.* 1.13.9-10 (131-134).

¹⁰⁴ Note 68 of this chapter.

eternal Wisdom and Spirit; that we may not conjure up some other god than him who would have himself recognised in that clear image.¹⁰⁵

In summing up the spiritual lessons of creation, Calvin insists that if we are to profit from this doctrine we must “grasp first the history of creation of the universe, as it has been set forth briefly by Moses”. And what is that history? That “God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing”.¹⁰⁶ To neglect such a clear intimation of the particular God-concept Calvin is so keen to present here, viz., that of the Triune God of the Scripture, is to ignore what is certainly of great importance to him.

That Calvin was keen to maintain a logical link between creation and providence in his discussion of creation in *Inst.* 1.14 is best summed up in the following words found at the end of this same discussion:

To conclude once for all, whenever we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us at the same time bear in mind that the dispensation of all those things which he has made is in his own hand and power and that we are indeed his children, whom he has received into his faithful protection to nourish and educate. We are therefore to await the fullness of all good things from him alone and to trust completely that he will never leave us destitute of what we need for salvation, and to hang our hopes on none but him! We are therefore, also, to petition him for whatever we desire; and we are to recognize as a blessing from him, and thankfully to acknowledge, every benefit that falls to our share. So, invited by the great sweetness of his beneficence and goodness, let us study to love and serve him with all our heart.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Inst.* 1.14.2 (162).

¹⁰⁶ *Inst.* 1.14.20 (179-180).

¹⁰⁷ *Inst.* 1.14.22 (182).

While Calvin does not refer to providence directly in his discussion of the creation of man in *Inst.* 1.15, he nevertheless gives a hint that it is not divorced as such from all he has said in the previous section. For instance, he takes to task the very same error he has mentioned with regards to the nature of angels and the devil in *Inst.* 1.14, namely, that of attributing some form of divinity to man's soul.¹⁰⁸ The distinction between man, just as is the case of the angels and the devil, as a creature and God as Creator must be held to tenaciously.¹⁰⁹ As before, he traces this error to the Manichees,¹¹⁰ thus giving a further clue of the close link he perceives between *Inst.* 1.14 and *Inst.* 1.15. There shall be occasion in the next chapter to examine why Calvin in *Inst.* 1.14-15 insisted upon this clear distinction between creature and Creator and how he perceives it to affect the Scriptural concept of the God of providence.

III. CONCLUSION

The above discussion lends support to the contention that Calvin had every intention of integrating providence within his treatment of the knowledge of God the Creator. Otherwise, why would he mention providence in every instance of his delineation of the *duplex cognitio* and *duplex cognitio Dei*? For that matter, why would he constantly draw attention to the necessity of keeping together the two correlated ideas of creation and providence? Surely it is because he considered providence to be integral to the true knowledge of God the Creator. Why he did so, as Calvin himself suggests above, is simply this: to separate providence from creation is a direct affront of what he sees to be the Scriptural concept of God the Creator. If one

¹⁰⁸ "For if man's soul be from the essence of God through derivation, it will follow that God's nature is subject not only to change and passions, but also to ignorance, wicked desires, infirmity, and all manner of vices... All these things one must attribute to God's nature, if we understand the soul to be from God's essence, or to be a secret inflowing of divinity. Who would not shudder at this monstrous thing?" *Inst.* 1.15.5 (191).

¹⁰⁹ "Therefore we must take it to be a fact that souls, although the image of God be engraved upon them, are just as much created as angels are." *Inst.* 1.15.5 (191).

¹¹⁰ The whole section, *Inst.* 1.15.5 is given over to showing this error of the Manichees.

understands the Scriptural concept of God the Creator correctly, according to Calvin, one will know that His providence is the logical consequence of His creation. In a word, providence must proceed from God's act of creation.

The foregoing discussion also serves to confirm, to an extent, the reason why Calvin located his treatment of providence within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. Calvin, as we indicated above, was conscious that central to a true conception of divine providence is nothing more nor less than a true concept of God the Creator. To put it another way, Calvin's own understanding of divine providence is dependent upon and defined by what he understands to be the Scriptural concept of the true and living God. His consistent attack upon the errors, for instance, of the Epicureans and the Manichees, his dependence upon the Scripture, his employment of God's Fatherhood as the paradigm for divine providence, his endeavour to keep his discussion of both creation and providence within a Trinitarian context, and his insistence upon a clear distinction between God and his creation and creatures, indicate not only the centrality of the concept of God to his treatment but also the centrality of Scripture to that concept. All these features in the early chapters of the 1559 *Institutes* have already been echoed in his polemical writings on the subject of divine providence and, I suggest, serve to confirm what has been proposed in Chapter 2, viz., that his polemical writings had alerted him to the necessity of locating providence within his treatment of the knowledge of God the Creator.

The task of the next three chapters is to examine the above data in greater detail, and to show how they collaborate to provide us with a better understanding of the precise nature of the God-concept Calvin had in mind in his exposition of divine providence.

CHAPTER FOUR

CALVIN ON THE FALSE VIEWS OF GOD THE CREATOR

As we have already noticed in Chapter 3 of this study, Calvin insists that his delineation of the *duplex cognitio Dei* is dependent upon "the general teaching of Scripture".¹ That he intended this to mean not merely the knowledge of God the Creator *per se* and God the Redeemer – though that is his primary aim – is evident when he qualifies "God the Maker" with a statement of his continued providential activity.² This understanding of the Scriptural revelation of God as not merely the Creator but sustainer and governor of his creation is consistently maintained by Calvin whenever he mentions the *duplex cognitio Dei*. Thus, in *Inst.* 1.6.1, having stated unequivocally that the patriarchs came to recognise God both as Creator and Redeemer through the Word,³ he leaves his readers in no doubt as to what he includes in his Scriptural understanding of the Creator by adding,

First in order came that kind of knowledge by which one is permitted to grasp who that God is who founded and governs the universe.⁴

This same emphasis is repeated in *Inst.* 1.10.1:

¹ "First, as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of *Scripture* the Lord shows himself to be simply the Creator. Then in the face of Christ [cf. 2 Cor 4:6] he shows himself the Redeemer." *Inst.* 1.2.1 (40).

² "Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel that God as our Maker supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings..." *Inst.* 1.2.1 (40).

³ "For, that they might pass from death to life, it was necessary to recognise God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer, for undoubtedly they arrived at both from *the Word*." See, *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70). [Emphasis, mine.]

⁴ *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70). Again, "Yet I repeat once more: besides the specific doctrine of faith and repentance that sets forth Christ as Mediator, *Scripture* adorns with unmistakable marks and tokens the one true God, in that he has created and governs the universe, in order that he may not be mixed up with the throng of false gods." *Inst.* 1.6.2 (72). [Emphasis, mine.]

We, however, are still concerned with that knowledge which stops at the creation of the world, and does not mount up to Christ the Mediator. But even if it shall be worthwhile a little later to cite certain passages from the New Testament, in which the power of God the Creator and of his *providence* in the preservation of the primal nature are proved, yet I wish to warn my readers what I now intend to do, lest they overleap the limits set for them. Finally, at present let it be enough to grasp how God, the Maker of heaven and earth, *governs* the universe founded by him.⁵

Evidently, Calvin seems to be very concerned to ensure that any Scriptural representation of God he provides in his treatment of the *duplex cognitio Dei* must include not merely God the Creator but also the God of providence. Why is that so?

In order to arrive at the answer, it may be appropriate at this juncture to have an overview of Calvin's *schema* for Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. A careful examination of Book 1 will indicate that Calvin was laying the groundwork for various distinctions between what he considers to be the Scriptural concept of God as opposed to what he calls false views of God.⁶ The most fundamental and basic distinction is this: Scripture reveals God as both Creator and Redeemer. As our consideration of the *duplex cognitio Dei* has shown, Calvin's main aim in Book 1 is to treat of the knowledge of God the Creator. That God the Redeemer is a subject he has presently postponed, he reiterates time and again.⁷ This, however, does not mean

⁵ *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97). [Emphasis, mine.]

⁶ Note, especially, the titles Calvin gave to Chapters 10-14, though this must not be taken to mean, as shall be evident, that Calvin only treats the false views of God in these chapters.

⁷ "First in order came that kind of knowledge by which one is permitted to grasp who that God is who founded and governs the universe. Then that other inner knowledge was added, which alone quickens dead souls, whereby God is known not only as the Founder of the universe and the sole Author and Ruler of all that is made, but also in the person of the Mediator as the Redeemer. But because we have not yet come to the fall of the world and the corruption of nature, I shall now forego discussion of the remedy. My readers therefore should remember that I am not yet going to discuss that covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of Abraham, or that part of doctrine

that Calvin is overlooking entirely the subject of God the Redeemer in Book 1. It only means that he will not treat of the subject in detail as he would later in the *Institutes*.⁸ Scholars are universally agreed, however, that for Calvin, at the most fundamental level, Scripture reveals God as both Creator and Redeemer and it is this revelation that distinguishes the God of the Bible from all other concepts of God.⁹

Since, by Calvin's own admitted design, God the Redeemer is to be treated elsewhere, we can safely assume that his overriding concern in Book 1 is the knowledge of God the Creator. It is crucial to maintain this distinctive emphasis because much of what Calvin has to say in Book 1 relates to a comparison and contrast between the false views of God the Creator on the one hand, and the Scriptural view on the other. This is

which has always separated believers from unbelieving folk, for it was founded in Christ. But here I shall discuss only how we should learn from Scripture that God, the Creator of the universe, can by sure marks be distinguished from all the throng of feigned gods. Then, in due order, that series will lead us to the redemption." *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70-71); "I do not yet touch upon the special covenant by which he distinguished the race of Abraham from the rest of the nations [cf. Gen 17:4]. For, even then in receiving by free adoption as sons those who were enemies, he showed himself to be their Redeemer. We, however, are still concerned with that knowledge which stops at the creation of the world, and does not mount up to Christ the Mediator." *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97).

⁸ Gerrish has rightly observed that "the doctrine of God in the *Institutes* remains incomplete in Book 1, and that only by a quite arbitrary selection could one presume to complete it from the chapters on predestination in Book 3 (chaps 21-23). Yet that is exactly how Calvin's doctrine of God has commonly been presented." He, however, does conclude that "the heart, though not the whole, of Calvin's view of God really is, after all, to be found in Book 1 of the *Institutes* – in the introductory reflection on piety, even before the chapters in which his doctrine of God is commonly looked for." See B A Gerrish, "Theology Within the Limits of Piety Alone", in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 199 and 203 respectively. Willis, after having examined the connection between the *duplex cognitio Dei* and the doctrine of the Trinity in Calvin, commented: "So it appears that Calvin, is after all, discussing his Christology already in Book I, though the major Christological section remains in Book II." See, David E Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1966), 125.

⁹ Apart from the critical passages related to the *duplex cognitio Dei*, viz., *Inst.* 1.2.1, 1.6.1, and 1.10.1, note the following from *Inst.* 1.6.2 (72): "Yet I repeat once more: besides the specific doctrine of faith and repentance that sets forth Christ as Mediator, Scripture adorns with unmistakable marks and tokens the one true God, in that he has created and governs the universe, in order that he may not be mixed up with the throng of false gods."

made clear by Calvin especially in Chapters 6 and 10 of Book 1.¹⁰ What, then, were the false views of God the Creator which Calvin was so keen to oppose in Book 1?

I. SCRIPTURE AND THE FALSE VIEWS OF GOD

It has been acknowledged by scholars that closely related to Calvin's delineation of the false views of God in Book 1 is the subject of idolatry. For example, Warfield has suggested that Calvin, in his formal treatment of the doctrine of God, is actually opposing the idolatry of the Roman Catholics and the Anti-trinitarianism of his day.¹¹ However, by confining Calvin's doctrine of God to *Inst.* 1.11-13 he unfortunately ignores Calvin's polemic against certain false views found in the earlier

¹⁰ "My readers therefore should remember that I am not yet going to discuss that covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of Abraham, or that part of doctrine which has always separated believers from unbelieving folk, for it was founded in Christ. But here I shall discuss only how we should learn from Scripture that God, the Creator of the universe, can by sure marks be distinguished from all the throng of feigned gods. Then, in due order, that series will lead us to the redemption. We shall derive many testimonies from the New Testament, and other testimonies also from the Law and the Prophets, where express mention is made of Christ. Nevertheless, all things will tend to this end, that God, the Artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in Scripture, and that what we ought to think of him is set forth there, lest we seek some uncertain deity by devious paths." *Inst.* 1.6.1 (71). "Yet I shall be content to have provided godly minds with a sort of index to what they should particularly look for in Scripture concerning God, and to direct their search to a sure goal. I do not yet touch upon the special covenant by which he distinguished the race of Abraham from the rest of the nations [cf. Gen 17:4]. For, even then in receiving by free adoption as sons those who were enemies, he showed himself to be their Redeemer. We, however, are still concerned with that knowledge which stops at the creation of the world, and does not mount up to Christ the Mediator. But even if it shall be worthwhile a little later to cite certain passages from the New Testament, in which the power of God the Creator and of his providence in the preservation of the primal nature are proved, yet I wish to warn my readers what I now intend to do, lest they overleap the limits set for them. Finally, at present let it be enough to grasp how God, the Maker of heaven and earth, governs the universe founded by him. Indeed, both his fatherly goodness and his beneficently inclined will are repeatedly extolled; and examples of his severity are given, which show him to be the righteous avenger of evil deeds, especially where his forbearance toward the obstinate is of no effect." *Inst.* 1.10.1 (97)

¹¹ "His (Calvin's) actual formal treatment of the doctrine of God thus divides itself into two parts, the former of which (chs. xi, xii), in strong Anti-Romish polemic is devoted to the uprooting of every refuge of idolatry, while the latter (chap. xiii), in equally strong polemic against the Anti-trinitarianism of the day, develops with theological acumen and vital faith the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity." Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 134.

chapters of Book 1. In his study of a single principle which can sum up the theology of Calvin in a way that can speak to us today, Battles has suggested that at the most fundamental level, Calvin was attacking idolatry in Book 1. But it was an idolatry which extends beyond the making and worship of physical idols (*re* Roman Catholicism). Referring to *Inst.* 1.10.3, he surmises:

The constructs, too, of the human mind can be as much the objects of idolatry as can physical representations of Deity. Calvin makes a direct application of the Old Testament critique of idolatry to the comparable idolatry of the papists of his own day (*Inst.* 1.11.10): this is repeated throughout the *Institutio* and in the commentaries, in a variety of ways. Thus an idol can be either a construct of the human mind which reduces the majesty of God and His ways of revelation to a mere shadow, or it can be a physical, palpable construction of the human hand that itself becomes the object of that worship and honour due God alone. The one is a defect of the truth; the other an exaggerated imitation of it. Both are false; truth lies in between.¹²

In his recent study on Calvin's Trinitarian understanding of the divine-human relationship, Butin's brief evaluation of Calvin's *schema* in Book 1 bears a resemblance to that of Battles above. He notes, for instance, that Calvin's discussion leads to the conclusion that all natural attempts to know God apart from his redemptive plan in Christ results in "idolatry", i.e., "false worship oriented toward a human projection of the divine."¹³

It would seem to me that Warfield's observation that Calvin was opposing Romish idolatry and Anti-trinitarianism in his treatment of the doctrine of God arises from a possible misreading of *Inst.* 1.11-13. He

¹² Ford Lewis Battles, "Calculus Fidei", in *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor*, 91.

¹³ Philip Walker Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 23.

assumes that Calvin treated Roman Catholic idolatry (*Inst.* 1.11-12) as one aberration and Anti-trinitarianism (*Inst.* 1.13) as the other, when in actual fact Calvin explicitly states that his treatment of the Trinity was his singular reply to idolatry. At the outset of his discussion on Romish idolatry in *Inst.* 1.11-12, Calvin has insisted that Scripture distinguishes the true God from the false by contrasting him with idols.¹⁴ He has gone on to indicate that what marks the true God off from idols is God's infinite and spiritual essence.¹⁵ He, finally, adds that "God also designates himself by another special mark to distinguish himself more precisely from idols." How?

For he so proclaims himself the sole God as to offer himself to be contemplated clearly in three persons.¹⁶

It would seem, therefore, that Warfield misses the point here. Calvin is not dealing so much with two aberrations of the doctrine of God. Rather, he was countering idolatry with the Scriptural representation of the Triune God. But is it just Romish idolatry? Or, is Battles closer to the truth – that Calvin was attacking idolatry on two fronts, namely, "concrete idolatry" (involving images of wood, stones, and so on) and "imaginative idolatry" (idolatry arising from the construct of the human mind)?¹⁷

That both forms of idolatry were intended in Calvin's treatment of the false views of God is evident from several considerations. For instance, having stated that God further distinguishes himself from idols by presenting himself to us in three persons, Calvin insists that unless "we

¹⁴ "But as Scripture, having regard for men's rude and stupid wit, customarily speaks in the manner of common folk, where it would distinguish the true God from the false it particularly contrasts him with idols." *Inst.* 1.11.1 (99-100).

¹⁵ "The scriptural teaching concerning God's infinite and spiritual essence ought to be enough, not only to banish popular delusions (i.e., Romish idolatry), but also to refute the subtleties of secular philosophy." *Inst.* 1.13.1. (120-121)

¹⁶ *Inst.* 1.13.2 (122).

¹⁷ I have coined the terminologies to distinguish the two forms of idolatry highlighted by Battles for the sake of brevity and clarity.

grasp these, only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God", ¹⁸ a phraseology he employs for philosophical speculation about the essence of God ¹⁹ or imaginative idolatry. It is also evident from Calvin's opening statement in *Inst.* 1.11 where he distinguishes what is taught by the philosophers (imaginative idolatry) from Romish or concrete idolatry. ²⁰ Not to be ignored is Calvin's differentiation of both just prior to his discussion of Romish idolatry. In *Inst.* 1.10, when summing up how Scripture sets the true God against all the gods of the heathen, ²¹ he clearly distinguishes the two forms of idolatry. He wrote:

For even the wisest of them openly display the vague wanderings

¹⁸ *Inst.* 1.13.2 (122). This statement follows immediately from the previous one where Calvin clearly differentiates the Scriptural concept of the Triune God from idolatry. In the previous section, he already indicated that philosophical speculation about God is not far from his mind: "The Scriptural teaching concerning God's infinite and spiritual essence ought to be enough, not only to banish popular delusions, but also to refute the subtleties of *secular philosophy*." *Inst.* 1.13.1 (120-121). [Emphasis, mine.]

¹⁹ "And here again we ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart." *Inst.* 1.5.9 (61-62). As early as the 1536 *Institutes*, Calvin has warned of this: "But when we call him almighty and creator of all things, we must ponder such omnipotence of his whereby he works all things in all, and such providence whereby he regulates all things [1 Cor 12:6; Lam. 3:37-38] – not of the sort those Sophists fancy: empty, insensate, idle." *Inst.* (1536), 2.10 (66-67).

²⁰ "But as Scripture, having regard for men's rude and stupid wit, customarily speaks in the manner of common folk, where it would distinguish the true God from the false it particularly contrasts him with idols. It does this, not to approve what is more subtly and elegantly taught by the philosophers, but the better to expose the world's folly, nay, madness, in searching for God...." *Inst.* 1.11.1 (99-100). Calvin was very much aware that pagan idolatry was denounced by men like Epicurus and, therefore, did not wish this statement to justify the views of men like him. Rather, he was attempting to show that one form of idolatry was not any worse than the other because both were false representations of God. More will be said about the implications of this observation of Calvin later in this chapter.

²¹ "But here I propose to summarise the general doctrine. And first, indeed, let readers observe that Scripture, to direct us to the true God, distinctly excludes and rejects all the gods of the heathen, for religion was commonly adulterated throughout almost all ages. Indeed, it is true that the name of one God was everywhere known and renowned... But all the heathen, to a man, by their own vanity either were dragged or slipped back into false inventions, and thus their perceptions so vanished that whatever they had naturally sensed concerning the sole God had no value beyond making them inexcusable." *Inst.* 1.10.3 (98-99).

of their minds when they long for some god or other to be present among them, and so invoke dubious gods in their prayers. Besides this, in imagining a god of many natures – although they held a view less absurd than the ignorant multitude with its Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, Minerva, and the rest – they, too, were not free of Satan's deceptions.²²

That Calvin should immediately add that he had already dealt with imaginative idolatry "elsewhere"²³ provides a clue as to how he envisaged Book 1 to be divided in terms of his treatment of the false views of God. Imaginative idolatry is dealt with (as he says above) in the chapters preceding Chapter 10 of Book 1, especially in *Inst.* 1.4-5.²⁴ And as Warfield and Battles have indicated above, and as the content of *Inst.* 1.11-12 so clearly bears out, Romish or concrete idolatry is dealt with in the chapters following Chapter 10 of Book 1.²⁵

It should be added, however, that while *Inst.* 1.4-5 does not solely treat of imaginative idolatry,²⁶ it nevertheless seems to be the primary thrust of Calvin there. For instance, his denunciation of speculative philosophy which he already charged Epicurus with introducing the

²² *Inst.* 1.10.3 (99).

²³ "As we have already said elsewhere, all the evasions the philosophers have skillfully contrived do not refute the charge of defection; rather, the truth of God has been corrupted by them." *Inst.* 1.10.3 (99).

²⁴ The titles of these two chapters give no immediate impression that Calvin was treating the subject of imaginative idolatry. But, as will be evident, the content unfailingly shows that Calvin had imaginative idolatry in mind.

²⁵ For instance, in his introductory remarks to *Inst.* 1.11, Calvin refers to the panting "after visible figures of God, and thus form gods of wood, stone, gold, silver, or other dead and corruptible matter". He refers to idolatry among the Persians (the worship of the sun and stars), the Egyptians (for whom no animal was not a figure of god) and the Greeks (who worshipped God in human form) as instances of such idolatry. See *Inst.* 1.11.1 (100).

²⁶ Note the term, "superstition" throughout *Inst.* 1.4-5 which, for Calvin, seems to refer more specifically to "concrete idolatry". For "imaginative idolatry", Calvin tends to prefer the term, "confusion". Thus, with specific reference to speculative philosophy, he wrote that they involved "God *confusedly* in the inferior course of his works", *Inst.* 1.5.5 (58). Similarly, he called human superstition and the error of philosophers, "this very *confused* diversity", *Inst.* 1.5.12 (65).

dūplex cognitio Dei,²⁷ is repeated time and again in these two chapters. Calvin maintains that man's "superstitions" about God arise from his "proud vanity" which measures God by "the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity", thus resulting in "empty speculation" about God's true nature. They "imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumption" and end up not worshipping the true God but "a figment and a dream of their own heart."²⁸ In the process, even though they "are compelled to recognise some god", they effectively deny his existence "by fashioning a dead and empty idol."²⁹ He reinforces this charge of idolatry, after having quoted Paul in Gal 4:8 and Eph. 2:12 in support, by stating in the next paragraph:

Nor is it of much concern, at least in this circumstance, whether you conceive of one God or several; for you continually depart from the true God and forsake him, and, having left him, you have nothing left except an accursed idol.³⁰

The different groups and persons he mentions in *Inst.* 1.5 comprise mainly those who would be guilty of precisely such a form of imaginative idolatry: the Epicureans,³¹ Aristotle,³² Vergil,³³ and Lucretius.³⁴ Indeed, when Calvin comes to sum up the failure of mankind to recognise God as he

²⁷ "What is God? Men who pose this question are merely toying with idle speculations. It is more important for us to know what sort he is and what is consistent with his nature. What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who has cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness? What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?" *Inst.* 1.2.2 (41).

²⁸ *Inst.* 1.4.1 (47-48).

²⁹ *Inst.* 1.4.2 (49).

³⁰ *Inst.* 1.4.3 (49).

³¹ *Inst.* 1.5.4 (56); 1.5.12 (65-66).

³² *Inst.* 1.5.5 (56).

³³ *Inst.* 1.5.5 (57-58).

³⁴ *Inst.* 1.5.5 (58).

truly is through his creation and providence, he says the whole tribe of philosophers are guilty, including "Plato, the most religious of all and the most circumspect."³⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that in summing up the ignorance of man concerning the Scriptural view of God, he puts them all under the category of idolaters:

Now we must also hold that all who corrupt pure religion - and this is sure to happen when each is given to his own opinion - separate themselves from the one and only God. Indeed, they will boast that they have something else in mind; but what they intend, or what they have persuaded themselves of, has not much bearing on the matter, seeing that the Holy Spirit pronounces them all to be apostates who in the blindness of their own minds substitute demons in place of God [cf. 1 Cor 10:20]. For this reason, Paul declares that the Ephesians were without God until they learned from the gospel what it was to worship the true God [Eph 2:12-13]. And this must not be restricted to one people, since elsewhere he states generally that all mortals "became vain in their reasonings" [Rom 1:21] after the majesty of the Creator had been disclosed to them in the fashioning of the universe. For this reason, Scripture to make place for the true and only God, condemned as falsehood and lying whatever of divinity had formerly been celebrated among the heathen; nor did any divine presence remain except on Mt. Zion, where the proper knowledge of God continued to flourish [Hab 2:18, 20]. Certainly among the pagans in Christ's lifetime the Samaritans seemed to come closest to true piety; yet we hear from Christ's mouth that they knew not what they worshipped [John

³⁵ *Inst.* 1.5.11 (64). Note that Calvin does not deny the culpability of those who are guilty of concrete idolatry - "the common folk and dull-witted men". But as he argues, "And what might not happen to others when the leading minds, whose task it is to light the pathway for the rest, wander and stumble!"

4:22]. From this it follows that they were deluded by vain error.³⁶

Calvin's above remark concerning the Samaritans' knowledge of God is not insignificant. He considers them not merely, as it were, "lesser Jews". Rather, he categorises them among "the heathen" and "the pagans" though, admittedly, the most pious of them all. Even they fall into "vain error" and, as the following comments on John 4:22 will indicate, they are to be considered idolaters no less than the rest of the pagan world because, like them, they do not depend on the Scripture for their view of God:

He now explains more fully what He had touched on before about the abolition of the Law. He divides the subject into two parts. First, He condemns the form of worshipping God which the Samaritans used as superstitious and false, and declares that the acceptable and lawful form was with the Jews. And He puts as the reason for the difference that the Jews received assurance from the Word of God about His worship, whereas the Samaritans had no certainty from God's lips. ...we are taught that we are not to essay anything in religion rashly or unthinkingly. For unless there is knowledge present, it is not God that we worship but a spectre or ghost. Hence all so-called good intentions are struck by this thunderbolt, which tells us that men can do nothing but err when they are guided by their own opinion without the Word or command of God... *What it all comes to is that God is only worshipped properly in the certainty of faith, which is necessarily born of the Word of God; and hence it follows that all who forsake the Word fall into idolatry.* For Christ plainly declares that an idol or an empty image is put in God's place when men are ignorant of the true God; and

³⁶ *Inst.* 1.5.13 (66-67). Cf. "We know that there has always been a host of gods in the world, as Paul says, 'There are many on the earth who are called gods,' (1 Cor. viii. 5.) We are to notice the opposition stated between the God of Israel and all others which man has formed in the exercise of an unlicensed imagination." *Comm.* on Psa 95:3, *CTS*, 33.

He accuses of ignorance all to whom God has not revealed Himself. As soon as we are deprived of the light of His Word, darkness and blindness reign in us... However much in their obstinacy those who worship God from their own notions or men's traditions flatter and praise themselves, this one Word thundering from heaven overthrows every divine and holy thing they think they possess: Ye worship that which ye know not. And so, if our religion is to be approved by God, it must needs rest on knowledge conceived of His Word."³⁷

We can now discern more clearly the role Calvin gives to Scripture in Book 1. He sees Scripture as central to delineating who the true God is from false gods or idols. All the views of God the Creator that are not in accordance with Scripture are false; and all false views of God, Calvin says, arises from and results in idolatry. But it is not merely concrete idolatry (which was the fault of the common folk); there is also imaginative idolatry (which was the fault of those who should know better, namely, the philosophers).³⁸ While it is true that both forms of idolatry are interrelated - for Calvin traces the origin of concrete idolatry in some sense to imaginative idolatry³⁹ - it must not be thought that there is a distinction

³⁷ *Comm. on John 4:22-26, CC, 98-99.* [Emphasis, mine.] Note the following as well: "He gives God this title, *He who dwelleth in Sion*, to distinguish him from all the false gods of the Gentiles. There is in the phrase a tacit comparison between the God who made his covenant with Abraham and Israel, and all the gods who, in every other part of the world except Judea, were worshipped according to the blinded and depraved fancies of men." *Comm. on Psa 9:11, CTS, 121*; "The knowledge of the true doctrine is extinguished amongst the Turks, the Jews, and Papists, and, as a necessary consequence, they lie immersed in error; for they cannot possibly return to a sound mind, or repent of their errors, when they are ignorant of the true God." *Comm. on Psa 97:7, CTS, 64.*

³⁸ Calvin makes this distinction in *Inst. 1.5.11 (64)*: "Not only the common folk and dull-witted men, but also the most excellent and those otherwise endowed with keen discernment, are infected with this disease." This is further confirmed by *Inst. 1.11.1 (99)* where Calvin clearly associates concrete idolatry with "the common folk".

³⁹ Calvin discusses the origin of concrete idolatry at length in *Inst. 1.11.8*. He submits that "Man's mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity, as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God. To these evils a new wickedness joins itself, that man tries to express in his work the sort of God he has

without a difference between the two. This will be more evident as we look at greater detail as to why Calvin distinguished the two forms of idolatry.

II. CONCRETE AND IMAGINATIVE IDOLATRY

As we have already noticed, concrete idolatry was more the fault of the common folk while imaginative idolatry was the fault of the educated folk, namely, the philosophers. It is a well-known fact that the philosophers criticised concrete idolatry which was the popular religion of the common folk.⁴⁰ The Epicureans were particularly noted for this. While not denying the existence of gods or a god, Epicurus, in his letter to Menceceus, ridiculed the popular religion and the common folk for being so taken up with it.⁴¹ Commenting on Epicurus' attitude towards religion,

inwardly conceived. Therefore the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth." *Inst.* 1.11.8 (108). Cf., on Psa 115:8, he comments: "Whence does idolatry takes its origin but from the imaginations of men?" *Comm.* on Psa 115:8, CTS, 347. Also, on Deut 12:29, "For this is the origin of idolatry, when the genuine simplicity of God's worship is known, that people begin to be dissatisfied with it, and curiously to inquire whether there is anything worthy of belief in the figments of men; for men's minds are soon attracted by the snares of novelty, so as to pollute, with various kinds of leaven, what has been delivered in God's word." *Comm.* on Deut 12:29, CTS, 451.

⁴⁰ Hicks has observed: "Philosophic criticism of the popular faith was no new thing in Greece. It began with Xenophanes, was rampant in the age of the sophists and was endorsed by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics." See R D Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), 306. Sandbach noted that in 399 BC, Aristotle was prosecuted and condemned to death on a charge of "not recognising the gods recognised by the state, introducing new divinities, and corrupting the young". See F D Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 12. Calvin observed the same attitude in Seneca: "Well known is that complaint of Seneca, which we read in Augustine: 'They establish the holy immortal and inviolable gods in the most vile and ignoble matter, and invest them with the appearance of men and wild beasts; some fashion them with sexes confused and with incongruous bodies, and call them divinities; if these received breath, and confronted us, they would be considered monsters'". *Inst.* 1.11.2 (101).

⁴¹ "Those things which without ceasing I have declared unto thee, those do and exercise thyself therein, holding them to be the elements of right life. First, believe that God is a being blessed and immortal according to the notion of a God commonly held amongst men; and so believing, thou shalt not affirm of him aught that is contrary to immortality or that agrees not with blessedness, but shalt believe about him whatsoever may uphold both his blessedness and his immortality. For verily there are gods, and the knowledge of them is manifest; but they are not such as the multitude believe, seeing that men do not steadfastly maintain the notions they form respecting them. Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them, is truly impious. For the utterances of the multitude

Hicks concludes thus:

He is not content with criticising the current polytheism, with its immoral fables and lying legends; he is not content with denouncing the doctrine of Providence as false and absurd. He assumes the offensive and brands as impious the acceptance of the beliefs which he rejects. It is the firm conviction that the popular religion was a degrading superstition, enslaving men's minds and causing the greatest evils; it is this which lends to the denunciations of Lucretius their moral earnestness and impassioned fervour.⁴²

This attitude of Epicurus towards concrete idolatry did not escape Calvin's notice. For instance, commenting on 1 Thess. 1:10, he writes:

Thus in ancient times the superstitions of the common people were made objects of derision by Epicurus, Diogenes the Cynic, and others like them, but in such a way that they corrupted the worship of God with their debased absurdities.⁴³

He stated in another context that "many Epicureans openly mock at all religion".⁴⁴ He also noted the "witty jest" of Horace, the Epicurean poet,

about the gods are not true preconceptions but false assumptions..." See H Usener, *Epicurea*, (Lipsiæ: Teubner, 1887), 59ff., tr. by R D Hicks in *Stoic and Epicurean* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961).

⁴² Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean*, 298.

⁴³ *Comm.* on 1 Thess. 1:10, CC, 339.

⁴⁴ "Meanwhile countless multitudes are hurried away to the impostures of Satan and to the Pope; others are as thoughtless and indifferent about their salvation as the lower animals; and many Epicureans openly mock at all religion." *Comm.* on Psa 119:136, CTS, 17. It was not merely pagan idolatry they attacked, as Calvin noted elsewhere, but also the pure religion of the Christian faith: "We see the Papists boldly rising up, and with all their might pouring forth their mockeries against us and the whole service of God. On the other hand, there are mingled amongst us, and flying about everywhere, Epicureans, who deride our simplicity. There are also many giants, who overwhelm us with reproaches; and this baseness has lasted from the time that the Gospel began to

who wrote mockingly of concrete idolatry.⁴⁵

However, it was not just the Epicureans. Sandbach has made the observation that in his *Politeia*, Zeno (the founder of Stoicism) "swept away everything that the Greeks regarded as characteristic of the *polis* or organised society. There were to be no temples, no law-courts, no 'gymnasia', no money.... Temples and statues of gods were the visible symbols of national unity; but the wise man will set no store by them, having a lofty contempt for the products of the manual workers' hands."⁴⁶ In his study of the contribution of Panaetius to Stoic philosophy, Rist has this to say:

Hence we must conclude, not that Panaetius is an atheist, or that he rejected the Old Stoic theory that god is to be particularly identified with the active element in the cosmos, but that he rejected either popular religion or allegorization of popular religion, or perhaps both.⁴⁷

This is not to say that the Stoics were, like the Epicureans, consistent in their negative attitude towards popular religion. Epictetus, for instance, had no difficulty accepting the whole cultus of popular religion, including the art of divination. Indeed, he continually attacked the godless Epicureans and the Sceptics for being immoral and unpatriotic and for promoting falsehood.⁴⁸ But as Edelstein has rightly observed, despite this

emerge from the corruptions of Popery even to the present day." *Comm.* on Psa 123:3, CTS, 83; "They are like the Epicurean scorers of God which swarm upon us on all sides today, who have quite thrown their sense of religion overboard and sneer angrily at the whole teaching of our faith as 'fairy tales'." *Comm.* on Jude 17, CC, 333.

⁴⁵ "Most just is that profane poet's mockery: 'Once I was a little fig tree trunk, a useless bit of wood, when the workman, in doubt whether he should make a stool, preferred that I be a god,' etc...". *Inst.* 1.11.4 (104).

⁴⁶ Sandbach, *op cit*, 24-25.

⁴⁷ J M Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 179.

⁴⁸ See Hicks, *op cit*, 134. In reply, the Epicureans and Sceptics "bitterly criticised the Stoics for their naiveté and superstitiousness" and "their stubborn adherence to prophecies and miracles". See Ludwig Edelstein, *The Meaning Of Stoicism*, Volume 21

seeming ambiguity, the Stoics were still one in that they treated the popular religion with a degree of disinterestedness and indifference.⁴⁹

Hicks concurs when he observes:

To the popular religion the Stoics were in reality as much opposed as Aristotle or Epicurus. They denounced what they called superstition, myths unworthy or immoral, trivial or mischievous rites.⁵⁰

It would be fair to say that it was this attitude of the philosophers which Calvin was keen to expose and to oppose. That they viewed themselves as above the common folk and, therefore, not to be classed as idolators was for Calvin a fallacy. It explains why when he touched upon the subject of concrete idolatry in *Inst.* 1.11, he qualifies himself by stating, in the same breath, that he does not mean to excuse those who are not guilty of concrete idolatry.⁵¹ The philosophers, too, are to be charged with idolatry, though of a different kind. Indeed, Calvin went so far as to suggest that imaginative idolatry is worse than concrete idolatry. In a very illuminating comment on Hab 2:20, he wrote:

in the Martin Classical Lectures delivered annually in Oberlin College (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 81.

⁴⁹ "Still, one cannot help feeling that if the Stoic was honest in endorsing the average faith in the divine, he was pretending somewhat and making concessions when he also endorsed the religious ceremonies. At any rate, it seems safe to say that these ceremonies mattered little to the Stoic philosopher..... They were devised for the many rather than for the few; and, practised in the right way, that is, practised with the right attitude of mind, they might not be harmful." See Edelstein, *op cit*, 82. Similarly, Rist says of Panaetius: "But whatever the solution to this problem, it is certainly true that, though Panaetius believes in god and providence, he treats them as 'givens' in the world, and has little thought to spare for them in his treatment of the aims of human life." See Rist, *op cit*, 179.

⁵⁰ Hicks, *op cit*, 40.

⁵¹ "But as Scripture, having regard for men's rude and stupid wit, customarily speaks in the manner of common folk, where it would distinguish the true God from the false it particularly contrasts him with idols. It does this, not to approve what is more subtly and elegantly taught by the philosophers, but the better to expose the world's folly, nay, madness, in searching for God..." *Inst.* 1.11.1 (99-100).

And we ought carefully to observe this order; for we see that many boldly deride all the superstitions which prevail in the world, and at the same time daringly and with cyclopic fury despise the true God. How many are at this day either Epicureans or Lucianians, who prate jestingly and scoffingly against the superstitions of the papacy, but in the meantime they are not influenced by any fear of God? If, however, we are to choose one of two evils, superstition is more tolerable than that gross impiety which obliterates every thought of a God. It is indeed true, that the more the superstitious toil in their delusions, the more they provoke God's wrath against them; for they transfer his glory to dead things; but yet they retain this principle - that honour and worship are due to God: but the profane, in whom there is no religion whatever, not only change God from what he is, but also strive as far as they can to reduce him to nothing. Hence I have said, that the order which the Prophet observes here ought to be maintained. For, after having overturned the false illusions of the devil, by which he deludes the superstitious, by setting before them a mere shadow in the place of the true God, he now sets up the true worship of the only true God.

Then the Prophet has hitherto been endeavouring to subvert superstitions, but he now builds up: for except God, when idols are pulled down, ascends his own tribunal, and shines there as supreme according to his right, it would be better, at least it would be more tolerable, as I have said, that superstitions should be left entire.⁵²

Similarly, when preaching on Deut. 12:1-5,⁵³ Calvin commented thus:

⁵² *Comm. on Habakkuk 2:20, CTS, 128-129.*

⁵³ Sermon No. 80, preached on Saturday, September 28, 1555, in John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, Reprint of 1583 fascimile (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), pp. 493-494.

For Moses saith not only, "You shall serve the Lord your God"; but before he comes to that point, he saith, "Ye shall beat down the altars, break the images,..." And why? For had the people continued still in such infections, it had been impossible that God should have been worshipped purely... But yet therewithall let us also learn that when men have cried out against superstition, they must not stay there; but they must chiefly proceed to the setting up again of God's service, as Moses speaketh thereof. For the very cause why there are so many Epicureans in the world nowadays,⁵⁴ and why there are so many folks that resemble swine and brute beasts rather than men is that they be contented to mock at the fondness and ignorance of the unbelievers, and yet could never skill themselves what it is to worship God purely, and to stick to him, and to humble themselves to his word.

The import of Calvin's argument is very clear. That the Epicureans, and others like them deride concrete idolatry might seem to be commendable. The tearing down of men's superstitions is laudable; that much Calvin concedes. But if in the process men are not directed towards the worship of the true God, then, you might as well not tear down superstition in the first place. For in concrete idolatry there is still, at least, a semblance of reverence for God, albeit misdirected and misplaced. But to overthrow all superstition without following it up by turning men's attention to the true God is to give the impression that belief in all gods, including the true God, is mere superstition. That, Calvin says, would be to deny the true God altogether. It was precisely this he accused the Epicureans of:

And this very confused diversity emboldened the Epicureans and

⁵⁴ Schreiner cites the case of Bucer who referred to a "crowd of Epicureans" that plagued the city of Strassburg. She also observed that a philosophical Epicureanism resurfaced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through the writings of Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, and Lucretius, and found expression in the attempts by Valla and Erasmus to reconcile Christianity with Epicurus. See, *The Theater of His Glory*, 20-21.

other crass despisers of piety to cast out all awareness of God. For when they saw the wisest persons contending with contrary opinions, from the disagreements of these - and even from their frivolous or absurd teaching - they did not hesitate to gather that men vainly and foolishly bring torments upon themselves when they seek for a god that is not. And this they thought to do with impunity because it would be preferable to deny outright God's existence than to fashion uncertain gods, and then stir up endless quarrels...⁵⁵

Evidently, then, Calvin had addressed the issue of imaginative idolatry so comprehensively in the *Institutes* and his other writings because of the tendency of those who are guilty of it to consider themselves as above-board. They did not see themselves as crass idolaters like the common folk who were given over to concrete idolatry. But, in Calvin's estimation, for all their impressive vitriolic against concrete idolatry they were no better for they were guilty of the same fault, though, of a different form.

The picture which emerges, therefore, in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes* is as follows: Calvin, in addressing both imaginative idolatry and concrete idolatry in Chapters 4-5 and Chapters 11-12 respectively in the way he did, was aiming to remove from idolaters all excuse for continuing in their idolatry, no matter what form this may take.⁵⁶ Since all false views of God arise from or result in idolatry, Calvin considered it expedient that he should touch upon both forms of idolatry. This may explain why Calvin moved his treatment of concrete idolatry under the discussion of "The

⁵⁵ *Inst.* 1.5.12 (65-66). Cf., Calvin on Exod 5:2, "The Epicureans, too, (of which pestilent sect the world is now full) although they foam and rage against God, still invariably take refuge in some cloud, under which their detestable madness may be concealed: for they pretend that amidst such a multitude of opinions, it is scarcely possible to discern who is God, or what He commands." *Comm.* on Exod 5:2, *CTS*, 114-115.

⁵⁶ Butin has made an almost similar observation, though I can find no evidence for his concluding that Calvin had Romans Chapter 1 in mind in *Inst.* 1.11-12. He writes: "Of course, in 1.4-5 and 11-12 he ultimately concludes with Romans Chapter 1 that such knowledge gives no genuine access to God, but only deprives unbelievers of the excuse that they are ignorant of God." See, Butin, *op cit*, 23.

Law” in the 1543-1554 editions of the *Institutes* to Chapters 11-12 of Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. Having dealt with imaginative idolatry in the earlier chapters of Book 1, Calvin did not wish to give the impression that Romish idolatry was, therefore, exempt from the criticisms he has levelled against the former. Indeed, as the next section will reveal, both forms of idolatry were guilty of promoting almost identical but false views of God the Creator. And it is this consideration which seems to have convinced Calvin that if he was to deal comprehensively with all the false views of God the Creator in his day, he must treat both forms of idolatry in the same breath.

III. IDOLATRY, CREATION AND PROVIDENCE

Having established Calvin’s approach in delineating the false views of God from the Scriptural view, we shall now examine more closely the reasons for Calvin’s rejection of the former. With regards to the Epicureans, Calvin summed up their philosophy as follows:

The Epicureans not only used to despise good and liberal arts, but openly hated them. Their philosophy was to think that the sun is two feet wide, that the world was constructed out of atoms, and, by trifling like that, to destroy the wonderful craftsmanship that is seen in the fabric of the world. If they were refuted a hundred times, they had no more sense of shame than dogs. Although, briefly, they admitted that there were gods, yet they imagined them to be idle in heaven, and to be devoting themselves to living on a magnificent scale, and that their blessing consisted in idleness alone. As they used to deny that the world was divinely created, as I have just said, so they supposed that human affairs are turned on chance, and are not governed by the providence of heaven. To them the greatest good was pleasure, not obscene and unbridled pleasure indeed, but yet as such by its attractions more and more ruined men already naturally inclined to the indulgence of the flesh. The

immortality of souls was like a fairy-tail to them, so that the result was that they freely allowed the indulgence of their bodies.⁵⁷

It must be said that Calvin recognised that the Epicureans did not deny the existence of God or gods *per se*.⁵⁸ However, their idea of God fell short of the Scriptural concept on two counts. First of all, Calvin says, by attributing the origin of the world to chance, the Epicureans denied that God is indeed the creator of the heavens and the earth.⁵⁹ Secondly, and more crucially, the Epicureans denied divine providence altogether. This, as we have seen in the previous chapter of this study, was the main reason for Calvin's attack on the Epicureans.⁶⁰ By stating that God has no care for the world,⁶¹ Calvin says, the Epicureans not only framed for

⁵⁷ *Comm. on Acts 17:18, CC, 106.*

⁵⁸ "The ungodly, on the contrary, despise them, and yet, in order not to be disturbed or tormented with the fear or apprehension of them, they would banish them into heaven; just as the Epicureans, although they did not presume avowedly to deny the existence of a God, yet imagined that he is confined to heaven, where he indulges himself in idleness, without taking any concern about what is done here below." *Comm. on Psa 10:5-6, CTS, 142.*

⁵⁹ "The prophet also, by the same eulogium, reproves the madness of those who dream, that the world has been brought into its present form by chance, as Epicurus raved about the elements being composed of atoms. As it is an imagination more than irrational to suppose, that a fabric so elegant, and of such surpassing embellishment, was put together by the fortuitous concourse of atoms, the prophet here bids us attend more carefully to the wisdom of God, and to that wonderful skill which shines forth in the whole government of the world." *Comm. on Psa 104:24, CTS, 164. Cf. Inst. 1.5.4 (56): "Let Epicurus answer what concourse of atoms cooks food and drink, turns part of it into excrement, part into blood, and begets such industry in the several members to carry out their tasks, as if so many souls ruled one body by common counsel!"*

⁶⁰ See Chapter 3, pages 55-56, especially Note 22, of this study.

⁶¹ "The true doctrine on this subject, is not, like Epicurus, to imagine that God is a being wholly devoted to ease and pleasures, and who, satisfied with himself alone, has no care whatever about mankind, but to place him on the throne of power and equity, so that we may be fully persuaded, that although he does not immediately succour those who are unrighteously oppressed, yet there is not a moment in which he ceases to take a deep interest in them." *Comm. on Psa. 9:8, CTS, 117.* "He gives us to understand by this word, that heaven is not a palace in which God remains idle and indulges in pleasures, as the Epicureans dream, but a royal court, from which he exercises his government over all parts of the world. If he has erected his throne, therefore, in the sanctuary of heaven, in order to govern the universe, it follows that he in no wise neglects the affairs of earth, but governs them with the highest reason and wisdom." *Comm. on Psa 33:13, CTS, 549.*

themselves another god,⁶² but as we noted above, they also effectively denied the existence of God. For what is the point of maintaining his existence if he has nothing to do with us nor we with him?⁶³ It would not make a shred of difference at all if he exists or not, since whatever he does cannot affect us nor vice versa. Indeed, it would seem that this is the main thrust of Calvin's opposition against the Epicureans' doctrine of God. While they may claim that God or the gods exist, nevertheless, by denying providence, they effectively deny his or their existence. It is not surprising, therefore, that Calvin viewed them as atheistic and not merely as deistic.⁶⁴ Though the deist (like the Epicurean) denies God's continued interest and activity in his creation, he (unlike the Epicurean) still recognises that God created the heavens and the earth.⁶⁵ The difference between the two can thus be put to down to a difference in their doctrine of creation: the deist accepts the truth of God as the Creator,⁶⁶ while the Epicurean would

⁶² "We must guard against the notion of Epicurus, who framed to himself a god who, having his abode in heaven, delighted only in idleness and pleasure." *Comm. on Psa 44:23, CTS*, 171.

⁶³ "What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who has cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness? What help is it, in short, to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?" *Inst.* 1.2.2 (41).

⁶⁴ "Not that all without exception would be brought to genuine repentance, - for experience has taught us in these our own times how atheistical men will cast off superstition, and yet assume the most shameless effrontery, - but that this is one of those consequences which the knowledge of God should effect, the turning of men from their errors unto God." *Comm. on Psa 97:7, CTS*, 64. Partee, quoting Cicero, has observed: "Since the Stoics believe that the universe is ruled by the providence of God, they attack the Epicurean view as atheistic and irreligious." Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, 116-117.

⁶⁵ Barth has observed that deists "held the view that there was indeed a creation and a divine Creator, but who like the Epicureans, although for different reasons, could not agree that this Creator had any further interest in the world which He had made". See Barth, *CD III/3*, 11. Berkouwer may have thought along the same line when he wrote: "It is a mistake to call eighteenth century deism merely a new form of Epicureanism with its teaching of a God who never bothered himself with the trivial affairs of this world." See Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, 27. For a treatment of deism in relation to divine providence in particular, see Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 71-80.

⁶⁶ Helm writes: "Deism states that *God created the universe* in accordance with certain physical laws, and that, by the inherent power with which it is endowed at the creation, it thereafter behaves in a regular, law-like way." See his *The Providence of God*, 74. [Emphasis, mine].

attribute the origin of the universe to chance and not God. But on the concept of God's continued providence, they seem to be one at heart: both deny, though for different reasons, that God has any continued interest in his creation. By Calvin's standard, therefore, the Epicureans were guilty not only of imaginative idolatry but, more seriously, of atheism because they denied the Scriptural revelation of God as Creator and of His continued providence.

It is worth noting, however, that while Calvin did not charge the Epicureans with deism as such, he dealt with a form of deism associated more with concrete idolatry than imaginative idolatry. As we noted before in discussing the creation of angels and the devil and man in Chapters 14-15, Calvin was keen not only to demonstrate that Scripture represents them as under the rule of God; he was also keen to note that their submission to God's rule arises from the distinction between their nature as God's creatures and that of God as Creator.⁶⁷ If the Libertines were guilty of denying the reality of angels,⁶⁸ concrete idolators were guilty of attributing a sufficiency and independence to angels which can only be true of God. This was especially true of Romish idolatry, since the cult of angel and saint worship was rife in Calvin's day. In her discussion of this aspect of Calvin's thought, Schreiner has noted that Calvin qualified his statements about the efficacy of angels by limiting their glory, forbidding speculation about them, insisting that they are only servants, and restricting them to the level of creation.⁶⁹ She cites the following as one of the main reasons for Calvin's qualification:

Calvin was attempting to abolish idolatrous worship, which he saw personified in the cult of saints as well as the cult of angels. If angels are only creatures, as Calvin asserted in agreement with

⁶⁷ See Chapter 3, pages 73-75 of this study.

⁶⁸ *Inst.* 1.14.9 (169-170). Cf. *Against the Libertines*, 231.

⁶⁹ Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 52.

the tradition, then to invoke them is simply idolatry.⁷⁰

Warfield has more accurately pointed to Calvin's concern that this accord given to angels may result in a deistic conception of God and his providential activity. Of this concern, Warfield writes:

As the angels owe their existence to God, so of course they subsist in Him. They were not brought into being to stand, deistically, over against God, sufficient in themselves: like all the rest of His creatures their dependence on God is absolute. Nothing can be ascribed to them as if it belonged to them apart from Him. They are, indeed, immortal: but this is so far from meaning that it is beyond the power of God to destroy them, that it rather means merely that it is the will of God to sustain them in endless being. In themselves considered, like all other creaturely existences, they are mortal.⁷¹

Warfield goes on to note that the suggestion that God carries on his providential government through the agency of angels can raise doubt of the reality of His immanent working "only on the supposition that these angels stand over against God in their independence as to break – so to speak – His contact with His works." That, he says, would be deism.⁷²

⁷⁰ Schreiner, *ibid*, 70.

⁷¹ Warfield, "Calvin and Calvinism", in Volume V of *The Works of Benjamin B Warfield*, 318.

⁷² "We must not confuse the question of the method of God's immanent activity with that of the fact of that activity. The suggestion that God carries on His providential government through the agency of angels is only a suggestion of the method of His immanent working and can raise doubt of the reality of His immanent working only on the supposition that these angels stand so over against God in their independence as to break - so to speak - His contact with His works. This is Deism, and is therefore of course inconsistent with the Divine immanence; but it has nothing to do with the question whether He employs angels in which He is immanent in His operations. In any event God executes His works of providence through the intermediation of second causes; for this is the very definition of a work of providence. The discovery that among these second causes there are always personal and impersonal agencies to be taken into account, can raise no question as between immanence and transcendence in God's modes of action - unless personal agents are conceived to be, as such, so independent of God as to exclude in all that is performed by their agency the conception of His immanent working." Warfield, *ibid*, 322.

That Calvin considered the cult of angel and saint worship so prevalent in Romish idolatry as guilty of precisely such a form of deism is evident from his concluding remarks at the end of his discussions on concrete idolatry and the angels respectively. In both instances, Calvin did not merely view their error as ascribing to angels and saints a sort of intermediary role between God and man. Rather, so "inclined are we to lapse into this error that what God rigorously reserves for himself alone we distribute among a great throng".⁷³ Similarly, he notes the tendency of man's reason to lapse into superstition with regards to the ministry of angels so much so that he thinks no honour ought to be withheld from them. "Thus," he says, "it happens that what belongs to God and Christ alone is transferred to them."⁷⁴ He further adds:

How preposterous, then, it is for us to be led away from God by the angels, who have been established to testify that his help is all the closer to us!.... For as God does not make them ministers of his power and goodness to share his glory with them, so he does not promise us his help through their ministry in order that we should divide our trust between them and him. Farewell, then, to that Platonic philosophy of seeking access to God through angels, and of worshipping them with intent to render God more approachable to us.⁷⁵

It seems clear, therefore, that Calvin felt in his criticism of concrete idolatry that there should be no half measures simply because he was

⁷³ *Inst.* 1.12.3 (120). It would seem that Calvin viewed all reverence shown to angels or saints as detracting from God's glory as the one and only true God, i.e., from a pure monotheism. This explains why he rejects the distinction between *latría* and *dulia* offered by Rome. Citing Paul's letter to the Galatians, Christ's response to the devil's temptation, and the angel's rebuke of John, he proved that this is, in reality, a distinction without a difference. See *Inst.* 1.12.2-3 (118-119). He concludes: "Thus, if we wish to have one God, we should remember that we must not pluck away even a particle of his glory and that he must retain what is his own." *Inst.* 1.12.3 (119-120).

⁷⁴ *Inst.* 1.14.10 (170).

⁷⁵ *Inst.* 1.14.12 (172).

conscious of the very sinful tendency of man to lapse into wholesale idolatry and, as a result, to adopt a practical deistic conception of God and his providential activity.

If atheism was the error of the Epicureans, and deism was the error of concrete idolatry, then pantheism can be said to be the error of the Stoics. While Calvin may have considered the Stoics superior to the Epicureans in their theology,⁷⁶ he nevertheless did not pretend that their concept of providence was therefore Scriptural even though he recognised they had a belief in providence. He once summed up the Stoic idea of providence in the following manner:

Although the Stoics said that the world is under the providence of God, yet they later spoiled that principle of their teaching with an absurd fiction or rather fantasy. For they did not acknowledge that God rules the world by His purpose, justice and power, but they constructed a labyrinth out of a complicated system (*complexu*) of causes, so that God Himself was bound by the necessity of fate, and was violently swept along with the heavenly machine, just as the poets bind their Jupiter with golden fetters, because the fates govern, while he is doing something else. And they inflated men with proud confidence so that they adorned themselves with the things they stripped off God.⁷⁷

It cannot be doubted that Calvin would have been aware that the Stoics saw no difficulty in identifying God as Reason, Fate, Zeus, Nature or even Providence.⁷⁸ Of Zeno, Brown says:

⁷⁶ Calvin affirms this in his *Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, 28-31. The Stoics, he says, "attribute the superintendence of human affairs to the gods, assert providence and leave nothing to mere chance." In contrast, the Epicureans "although they do not deny the existence of the gods, do the closest thing to it; they imagine the gods to be pleasure-loving, idle, caring not for mortals..."

⁷⁷ *Comm. on Acts 17:18*, CC, 106-107.

⁷⁸ "Three powers really govern the world: Zeus, Nature, and Fate, Fate being the third from Zeus in Posidonius' opinion, whereas the Stoics in general identified Zeus or

Zeno could also say that "God is one and the same with Reason, Fate and Zeus; he is also called by many other names." The term *kosmos* could likewise mean God himself, the orderly arrangement of the heavenly bodies, or the sum total of God and the universe together.⁷⁹

It is in the light of the above ambiguity that Edelstein warns, "...if the Stoic speaks of God's providence, one must not forget that this providence is identical with nature and necessity."⁸⁰ While attempts have been made to differentiate the terms,⁸¹ it cannot be denied that, at best, they only confuse matters more. This was not lost on Calvin. He noted:

But among the philosophers who have tried with reason and learning to penetrate into heaven, how shameful is the diversity! As each was furnished with higher wit, graced with art and knowledge, so did he seem to camouflage his utterances; yet if you look more closely upon all these, you will find them all to be fleeting unrealities. The Stoics thought themselves very clear when they said that one could elicit from all parts of nature various names for

Providence with Nature and necessity." Edelstein, *op cit*, 62. "Plutarch, who quotes this (*Moralia* 1049 F), adds: 'that universal nature and nature's plan are Fate and Providence and Zeus, is known even in the antipodes'." Sandbach, *op cit*, 102.

⁷⁹ Colin Brown, *Christianity & Western Thought, Volume 1* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 57.

⁸⁰ Edelstein, *op cit*, 34. Hicks, in examining Heraclitus' contribution to Stoic philosophy, concluded thus of Heraclitus' theology: "It makes no difference whether we name Him Zeus, or Fire, or Logos." Hicks, *op cit*, 11-12.

⁸¹ For instance, Sandbach has observed: "Since the world and its events are entirely determined by God, thought of as a plan, he can be identified with Nature, with Fate, and with Providence. Nature (*physis*) is a dynamic term, 'the way things grow', and Zeno defined Nature as 'a fire that is an artificer, proceeding methodically to generation'. This is the fire that is God, who methodically executes the plan according to which the world and all that is in it change and grow. Fate is a name for the certainty of the process: the plan is inexorably executed. Providence is God's rationality: the process is purposeful." *Op cit*, 79-80. Also, Hicks: "Thus God, Nature, Reason, World-Soul, Germinal Reason, Law, Providence, Necessity, Destiny are but expressions of the different relations in which the one universe, the sum and whole of existence, stands to particular things and events within it." *Op cit*, 26.

God, yet without on this account destroying the unity of God - as if, indeed, we were not already more than prone to vanity, without being drawn farther and more violently into error by the multiplicity of gods foisted upon us!⁸²

Indeed, Calvin indicates that it was this confusion among the Stoics in their understanding of God which eventually led the Epicureans to overthrow the idea of God's existence.⁸³

What raised Calvin's ire with regards to the Stoics' idea of God is this: by attributing to God the plethora of names they have invented from their observation of nature, they actually confused the creature with the Creator. The clear distinction between God and his creation so patent in Scripture is thereby abolished. In an extended discussion in *Inst.* 1.5.5, Calvin accuses the Stoics of depriving God of his right by praising nature and even proposing the divinity of man.⁸⁴ While conceding momentarily to

⁸² *Inst.* 1.5.12 (65-66). Hicks confirms this observation of Calvin when he writes thus of the Stoic idea of God: "At the same time it was their task to cherish and foster all the elements of the orthodox faith which could be pressed into the service of their system. They took religion under their protection and felt at liberty to defend and uphold the truth in polytheism. The universe is God, the one supreme Being, who may be addressed as Zeus. But, further, divinity must be ascribed to his manifestations, the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars, the forces of nature, the blessings and advantages of life, such as corn and wine, the qualities which tend to the welfare of the individual and society-even to deified men. When the world was thus peopled with divine agents, it was necessary to turn to account myth and legend, especially the poems of Homer and Hesiod, by extracting from them or reading into their physical explanations and moral truths. Thus some moral significance was discovered in almost every incident in the career of the two favourite heroes, Hercules and Ulysses. But the popular religion had a strong hold on men's minds by means of divination and oracles. To these the Stoics lent the sanction of their system." See Hicks, *op cit*, 40-41.

⁸³ "And this very confused diversity emboldened the Epicureans and other crass despisers of piety to cast out all awareness of God. For when they saw the wisest persons contending with contrary opinions, from the disagreements of these - and even from their frivolous or absurd teaching - they did not hesitate to gather that men vainly and foolishly bring torments upon themselves when they seek for a god that is not." *Inst.* 1.5.12 (66).

⁸⁴ "I take to task those given to fanciful subtleties who willingly drag forth in oblique fashion that frigid statement of Aristotle both to destroy the immortality of the soul and to deprive God of his right... For since the soul has organic faculties, they by this pretext bind the soul to the body so that it may not subsist without it, and by praising nature they suppress God's name as far as they can... Now what reason would there be to believe that man is divine and not to recognise his Creator?... Shall we think ourselves

the suggestion that “nature is God”, he nevertheless eschews it by saying “it is a harsh and improper saying, since nature is rather the order prescribed by God”. To say that “nature is God” is, therefore, “to involve God confusedly in the inferior course of his works.”⁸⁵

Despite the difference between the Epicureans and Stoics in their view of providence, Calvin once suggested that depending upon how the Stoics define providence, the Stoics actually are no better than the Epicureans. Commenting on the phrase, “It is [God] who changes times and portions of time” in Dan 2:21, Calvin wrote:

For our own practical improvement we should consider what the Prophet is here teaching, how revolutions, as they are called, are testimonies of God’s power, and point out with the finger to the truth that the affairs of men are ruled by the Most High. For we must of necessity adopt one or the other of these views, either that nature rules over human events, or else fortune turns about in every direction, things which ought to have an even course. As far as nature is concerned, its course would be even, unless God by his singular counsel, as we have seen, thus changes the course of the times. Yet those philosophers who assign the supreme authority to nature are much sounder than others who place fortune in the highest rank. For if we admit for a moment this latter opinion that fortune directs human affairs by a kind of blind impulse, whence comes this fortune? If you ask them for a definition, what answer will they make? They will surely be compelled to confess this, the word “fortune” explains nothing. But neither God nor nature will have any place in this vain and changeable government of the world, where all things throw themselves into distinct forms without the least order or connection.

the inventors of so many arts and useful things that God may be defrauded of his praise...” *Inst.* 1.5.5 (56-57).

⁸⁵ *Inst.* 1.5.5 (58).

And if this be granted, truly the doctrine of Epicurus will be received, because if God resigns the supreme government of the world, so that all things are rashly mingled together, he is no longer God. But in this variety he rather displays his hand in claiming for himself the empire over the world. In so many changes, then, which meet us on every side, and by which the whole face of things is renewed, we must remember that the Providence of God shines forth; and things do not flow on in an even course, because then the peculiar property of God might with some shew of reason be ascribed to nature. God, I say, so changes empires, and times, and seasons, that we should learn to look up to him. If the sun always rose and set at the same period, or at least certain symmetrical changes took place yearly, without any causal change; if the days of winter were not short, and those of summer not long, we might then discover the same order in nature, and in this way God would be rejected from his own dominion. But when the days of winter not only differ in length from those of summer, but even spring does not always retain the same temperature, but is sometimes stormy and snowy, and at other times warm and genial; and since summers are so various, no year being just like the former one; since the air is changed every hour, and the heavens put on new appearances – when we discern all these things, God rouses us up, that we may not grow torpid in our own grossness, and erect nature into a deity, and deprive him of his lawful honour, and transfer to our own fancy what he claims for himself alone... Daniel, therefore, very reasonably corrects the perverse opinion which commonly seizes upon the sense of all, that the world either rolls on by chance, or that nature is the supreme deity, when he asserts – God changes times and seasons.⁸⁶

Calvin delineates two possible views of providence, apart from the one

⁸⁶ *Comm. on Dan 2:21, CTS, 144-145.*

found in Scripture, afforded by the reality of all that we see around us. One involves a concept of providence arising from the idea of order, an idea best expressed by the order of nature. The other involves a concept arising from the idea of contingency or an interruption to the usual order of things ("fortune turns about in every direction, things which ought to have an even course"). If, like the Stoics, providence is attributed to "fortune"⁸⁷, then they are no better than the Epicureans because this view assumes that God is not in direct control of his creation. Rather, God has abandoned the activity of providence to the whim and fancy of fortune. That would be to deny God altogether, just as the Epicureans did, since God is not seen to be actively involved in providence. But if providence is attributed to "nature" then, how does one account for the changes evident in nature, and that nature does not always follow a strict regime, not all the time, at least?⁸⁸ In a word, where is the place for contingent events or happenings which are a reality of living in this world?

Recognising that his critics had charged his own doctrine of divine providence as nothing more nor less than Stoic fate, Calvin points out the difference as follows:

We do not, with the Stoics, contrive a necessity out of the perpetual connection and intimately related series of causes, which is contained in nature; but we make God the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out

⁸⁷ Calvin seems to use "fortune", "blind impulse" and even "chance" interchangeably here probably because all three terms reflect the idea of contingency. Similarly, in *Inst.* 1.16, Calvin employs "fate" for the same idea and uses it interchangeably with "fortune" and "chance". See especially *Inst.* 1.16.2, 1.16.6 and 1.16.8-9.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Inst.* 1.16.2 (199): "Then when we read that at Joshua's prayers the sun stood still in one degree for two days..., and that its shadow went back ten degrees for the sake of king Hezekiah..., God has witnessed by those few miracles that the sun does not daily rise and set by a blind instinct of nature but that he himself, to renew remembrance of his fatherly favour toward us, governs its course. Nothing is more natural than for spring to follow winter; summer, spring; and fall, summer – each in turn. Yet in this series one sees such great and uneven diversity that it readily appears each year, month, and day is governed by a new, a special, providence of God."

what he has decreed. From this we declare that not only heaven and earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are borne by it to their appointed end.⁸⁹

From the foregoing discussion, the following elements would seem to distinguish, for Calvin, the Scriptural understanding of divine providence from that of Stoicism. First of all, Calvin insists that the Scripture clearly makes a distinction between the Creator and his creation or creatures ("but we make God the ruler and governor of all things"). The Stoics, Calvin maintains, make no such distinction and this is evident from the way in which they confuse God with nature, fortune, fate or reason. In so doing, Calvin says, the Stoics are guilty of either attributing divinity to God's creation; or else, they deprive God of the divinity he alone possesses. That is, they either promote nature and secondary causes to the status of God himself; or else, they actually demote God to the status of his creation and secondary causes.⁹⁰ Both positions are false and they both arise from the one error of not maintaining a clear distinction between God the Creator and all that he has created. In a word, the Stoics were guilty of pantheism in their concept of God.

This is probably why Calvin is at such great pains in eschewing all pantheistic conceptions of creation in Chapters 14-15.⁹¹ As we already noted in the previous chapter of this study, this was also the fault of the Manichees and Libertines.⁹² However, unlike them, the Stoics did not, in

⁸⁹ *Inst.* 1.16.8 (207).

⁹⁰ This has been similarly observed by P Merlan. He noticed that from the standpoint of religion, the most significant aspect of Stoicism is what has been called a "mundanization" or materialization of the divine, or, on the contrary, a "divinization" or spiritualization of matter. See P. Merlan in A.H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, 124.

⁹¹ Warfield has rightly observed that Calvin's "crispest definition of creation he lets fall incidentally in repelling the pantheistic notion..." See "Calvin and Calvinism", Volume V of *The Works of Benjamin B Warfield*, 289.

⁹² See Chapter 3, pages 75-77 of this study.

Calvin's estimation anyway, seem to have been guilty of dualism. Calvin had charged the Manichees with a dualistic concept of God and had inveighed against the Libertines for adopting that concept.⁹³ While conceding that the apostle John considers the devil as the author, leader, and architect of all malice and iniquity,⁹⁴ at no point did Calvin adopt the dualistic language of the Manichees and said as they did: that the devil is the origin of evil and God is the origin of good. Indeed, that is the primary reason why Calvin insisted that the devil, like the angels, is a creature of God.⁹⁵ And though he is a powerful being, he nevertheless "can do nothing unless God wills and assents to it".⁹⁶ Even granted that Calvin dealt with the error of dualism, it cannot be doubted that in Chapters 14-15, his emphasis falls upon the error of pantheism and that simply because it was an error common not only to the Libertines but also to the Stoics.

Secondly, Calvin considers the Stoic understanding of providence to be irrational. By confusing God with his creation and their so-called "related series of causes", God, the "Uncaused One", becomes necessarily a "caused". Using a modern analogy, the Stoics confuse the watchmaker for the watch; and that is irrational. In a very scathing remark upon this irrationality, Calvin compares Aristotle's so-called "ingenuity" in discussing the subject of secondary causes with the simplicity of a child

⁹³ See *Inst.* 1.14.3 (162-163) and *Against the Libertines*, 196-197.

⁹⁴ *Inst.* 1.14.15 (174): "This, also, is what John means in his letter, when he writes that 'the devil has sinned from the beginning' [1 John 3:8]. Indeed, he considers him as the author, leader, and architect of all malice and iniquity."

⁹⁵ "Yet, since the devil is created by God, let us remember that this malice, which we attribute to his nature, came not from his creation but from his perversion... Therefore, lest we ourselves linger over superfluous matters, let us be content with this brief summary of the nature of devils: they were when first created angels of God, but by degeneration they ruined themselves, and became the instrument of ruin for others." *Inst.* 1.14.16.

⁹⁶ *Inst.* 1.14.17 (175). Warfield has aptly commented that in *Inst.* 1.14.17-18, "Calvin resolves the dualism which is introduced into the universe by the intrusion of evil into it, by showing that this evil itself is held under the control of God and is employed for his divine purpose...." See his "Calvin and Calvinism", Volume V of *The Works of Benjamin B Warfield*, 326.

and concludes thus:

The *sending forth of his word* is nothing else than the secret influence by which [God] regulates and governs all things, for without his orders and appointment no movement could take place among the elements, nor could they be borne, now one way and now another, upon their own spontaneous impulse without his foregoing secret decree. He says, that *his word runneth quickly*, because, when once God has intimated his will, all things concur to carry it into effect. If we do not hold fast by this principle, however acutely we may investigate second causes, all our perspicacity will come to nothing. It is thus that Aristotle, for example, has shown such ingenuity upon the subject of meteors, that he discusses their natural causes most exactly, while he omits the main point of all, upon which the merest child, at least having any religion, has the superiority over him. He must have little discernment who, in the sudden snows and hoar-frosts, does not perceive how quickly the word of God runs. If, then, we would avoid a senseless natural philosophy, we must always start with this principle, that everything in nature depends upon the will of God, and that the whole course of nature is only the prompt carrying into effect of his orders.⁹⁷

Similarly, he notes that man, of all the creatures of God, has been endued with sense and reason. Unfortunately, this rationality does not seem to be evident at all when it involves the knowledge of God the Creator. Commenting on Psa 29:5, Calvin observed thus:

What a monstrous thing is it, that while all the irrational portion of the creation tremble before God, men alone, who are endued with sense and reason, are not moved! Moreover, though they possess genius and learning, they employ enchantments to shut their ears

⁹⁷ *Comm. on Psa 147:15, CTS, 300-301.*

against God's voice, however powerful, lest it should reach their hearts. Philosophers think not that they have reasoned skilfully enough about inferior causes, unless they separate God very far from his works. It is a diabolical science, however, which fixes our contemplations on the works of nature, and turns them away from God. If any one who wished to know a man should take no notice of his face, but should fix his eyes only on the points of his nails, his folly might justly be derided. But far greater is the folly of those philosophers, who, out of mediate and proximate causes, weave themselves veils, lest they should be compelled to acknowledge the hand of God, which manifestly displays itself in his works.⁹⁸

Once again, Aristotle comes in for Calvin's criticism.⁹⁹ For the same reason, Calvin rejected the Stoic idea of fate. When the Stoics dispute about fate, he says, "they not only involve themselves and the thing also of which they treat in intricate mazes, but, at the same time, involve in perplexity an indubitable truth; for in imagining a concatenation of causes, they divest God of the government of the world".¹⁰⁰

Thirdly, Calvin also objected to the Stoic idea of providence because it is purposeless or meaningless.¹⁰¹ This is highlighted when, in

⁹⁸ *Comm.* on Psa 29:5, CTS, 479.

⁹⁹ "Aristotle, in his book on Meteors, reasons very shrewdly about these things, in so far as relates to proximate causes, only that he omits the chief point. The investigation of these would, indeed, be both a profitable and pleasant exercise, were we led by it, as we ought, to the Author of Nature himself. But nothing is more preposterous than, when we meet with mediate causes, however many, to be stopped and retarded by them, as by so many obstacles, from approaching God; for this is the same as if a man were to remain at the very rudiments of things during his whole life, without going farther. In short, this is to learn in such a manner that you can never know anything." *Comm.* on Psa 29:5, CTS, 480.

¹⁰⁰ *Comm.* on Psa 105:19, CTS, 189.

¹⁰¹ A classic example of just such a concept may be found in Marcus Aurelius who insisted that life should be faced rationally with Stoic resignation, regardless of whether there is a purposeful providence or chaos. He once wrote, reflecting precisely such a purposeless resignation: "Either there is a fatal necessity and invincible order, or a kind Providence, or a confusion without a purpose and without a director. If then there is an invincible necessity, why dost thou resist? But if there is a Providence which allows itself to be propitiated, make thyself worthy of the help of the divinity. But if there is a

contrast to fate, Calvin maintains that the Scripture represents God as “the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed”.¹⁰² Two particular elements of the Scriptural idea of divine providence are emphasised by Calvin here in contrast to Stoic fate. Firstly, in the former we are dealing with a Person, God, and not a “thing” or “idea” like fate. That means the Scriptural idea of divine providence is personal, and not impersonal.¹⁰³ Indeed, as Warfield has observed, the two “differ precisely as a person differs from a machine”.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, not only is the Scriptural idea of providence personal; it is also purposeful. This arises, of course, from the Scriptural concept of a purposeful God who (as Calvin notes above) by his wisdom and power will

confusion without a governor, be content that in such a tempest thou hast in thyself a certain ruling intelligence. And even if the tempest carry thee away, let it carry away the poor flesh, the poor breath, everything else; for the intelligence at least it will not carry away.” See his *Meditations* 12.14, in *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, ed. Whitney J Oates (New York: Random House, 1940), 581.

¹⁰² *Inst.* 1.16.8 (207).

¹⁰³ In delineating the two, Brunner has similarly observed that “the Stoic idea of Providence – like that of Platonism and of Modern idealism – is impersonal. It is an impersonal world-reason which lies behind all that happens in the world.” While granting that the personal element was present in the celebrated hymn of Zeus by Cleanthes, Brunner nevertheless maintains that the fact that Stoic providence is identified with fate “is an indication that we cannot take Stoic personalism very seriously, in spite of all the impressive religious language of the Hymn to Zeus.” See, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Volume II, 163 and 154, respectively.

¹⁰⁴ Warfield applied the contrast to fatalism and predestination; but it could easily have applied to fatalism and divine providence. The full text is as follows: “What, now, is the real difference between this Fatalism and the Predestination taught, say, in our Confession? ‘Predestination and Fatalism,’ says Schopenhauer, ‘do not differ in the main. They differ only in this, that with predestination the external determination of human action proceeds from a rational Being, and with fatalism from an irrational one. But in either case the result is the same.’ That is to say, they differ precisely as a person differs from a machine. And yet Schopenhauer can represent this as not a radical difference! Professor William James knows better; and in his lectures on ‘The Varieties of Religious Experience’ enlarges on the difference. It is illustrated, he says, by the difference between the chill remark of Marcus Aurelius: ‘If the gods care not for me or my children, there is a reason for it’; and the passionate cry of Job, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!’ Nor is the difference solely in emotional mood. It is precisely the difference that stretches between materialism and religion. There is, therefore, no heresy so great, no heresy that so utterly tears religion up by the roots, as the heresy that thinks of God under the analogy of natural force and forgets that he is a person.” B B Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings, Volume 1* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 394-395.

carry out what he has purposed. So that all that happens, happens because he has decreed it. That Calvin was particularly keen to emphasise this second element is evident from the frequency with which he reiterates it in the *locus classicus*. For example, he claims that Jeremiah forbade God's children to fear the stars and signs of heaven, as unbelievers commonly do, because "there is no erratic power, or action, or motion in creatures, but that they are governed by God's secret plan in such a way that nothing happens except what is knowingly and willingly decreed by him".¹⁰⁵ If a merchant should fall victim to thieves and is slain, his death was "not only foreseen by God's eye, but also determined by his decree. For it is not said that he foresaw how long the life of each man would extend, but that he determined and fixed the bounds that men cannot pass".¹⁰⁶ That man can "accomplish nothing except by God's secret command, that they cannot by deliberating accomplish anything except what he has already decreed with himself and determines by his secret direction, is proved by innumerable and clear testimonies".¹⁰⁷ Indeed, it could be said that Calvin's objection to the ideas of chance, fortune, and fate is closely bound up with his unwavering conviction that Scripture represents God as purposeful.¹⁰⁸ It is for this reason that the Christian should not attribute all that happens to chance, fortune or fate.¹⁰⁹ Rather, "since the order, reason, end, and

¹⁰⁵ *Inst.* 1.16.3 (201).

¹⁰⁶ *Inst.* 1.16.9 (208-210).

¹⁰⁷ *Inst.* 1.18.1 (229). Having cited different Biblical examples, Calvin concludes thus: "We very often find in the Sacred History that whatever happens proceeds from the Lord, as for instance the defection of the ten tribes [1 Kings 11:31], the death of Eli's sons [1 Sam 2:34] and very many examples of this sort. Those who are moderately versed in the Scriptures see that for the sake of brevity I have put forward only a few of many testimonies. Yet from these it is more than evident that they babble and talk absurdly who, in place of God's providence, substitute bare permission - as if God sat in a watchtower awaiting chance events, and his judgements thus depended upon human will."

¹⁰⁸ Calvin devotes *Inst.* 1.16.8-9 (207-210) and 1.17.1-2 (210-214) to a discussion of this.

¹⁰⁹ "Not that we think that fortune rules the world and men, tumbling all things at random up and down, for it is fitting that this folly be absent from the Christian's breast! Yet as far as the capacity of our mind is concerned, all things therein seem fortuitous. What will a Christian think at this point? Just this: whatever happened in a death of this sort he will regard as fortuitous by nature, as it is; yet he will not doubt that God's

necessity of those things which happen for the most part lie hidden in God's purpose, and are not apprehended by human opinion", "in our hearts it nonetheless remains fixed that nothing will take place that the Lord has not previously foreseen."¹¹⁰

It is precisely because Calvin understands Scripture to represent divine providence as both personal and purposeful that he insists upon its very practical nature. As the previous chapter of this study has already shown, the knowledge of God the Creator for Calvin has tremendous practical implications.¹¹¹ It is "to our advantage to know him".¹¹² God has revealed himself through the order of nature so that man may not be "excluded from access to happiness".¹¹³ This is even more evident in the *locus classicus*. Indeed, it could be said that the primary emphasis of Calvin's treatment of divine providence in the *locus classicus* is its practical outworking. In *Inst.* 1.16.3, Calvin insists that God's omnipotence is no mere theory nor just a potential reality. Rather, it is the practical outworking of his purpose in history.¹¹⁴ How this benefits the believer is spelled out briefly as well,¹¹⁵ though this is only more fully developed in Chapter 17 which is principally devoted to a discussion of how the Scriptural doctrine of divine

providence exercised authority over fortune in directing its end." *Inst.* 1.16.9 (208-209).

¹¹⁰ *Inst.* 1.16.9 (208-209).

¹¹¹ See especially Chapter 3, pages 54-55, 58, and 71-74, of this study.

¹¹² *Inst.* 1.2.1 (39).

¹¹³ *Inst.* 1.5.1 (51).

¹¹⁴ "And truly God claims, and would have us grant him, omnipotence – not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists imagine, but a watchful, effective, active sort, engaged in ceaseless activity. Not, indeed, an omnipotence that is only a general principle of confused motion... but one that is directed toward individual and particular motions. For he is deemed omnipotent, not because he can indeed act, yet sometimes ceases and sits in idleness, or continues by a general impulse that order of nature which he previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation." *Inst.* 1.16.3 (200).

¹¹⁵ "Those who ascribe just praise to God's omnipotence doubly benefit thereby. First, power ample enough to do good there is in him in whose possession are heaven and earth... Secondly, they may safely rest in the protection of him to whose will are subject all the harmful things which, whatever their source, we may fear..." *Inst.* 1.16.3 (201).

providence is the basis for practical Christian living, and not a matter for theological or philosophical speculation. Calvin mentions three aspects of the doctrine of divine providence which are of practical value to the Christian and then elaborates upon them.¹¹⁶ For Calvin, therefore, it would seem the subjective benefits of the Scriptural doctrine of providence for the Christian were boundless.¹¹⁷ It provides "incredible freedom from worry about the future."¹¹⁸ When "that light of divine providence has once shone upon a godly man, he is then relieved and set free not only from the extreme anxiety and fear that were pressing him before, but from every care."¹¹⁹

That Calvin considered this practical aspect to be of the utmost importance is evident from the contrasting language he employs for those who recognise God's providence and those who do not. For instance, he highlights the happiness of the Christian who recognises God's acts of providence.¹²⁰ He contrasts this with those who are ignorant of it and speaks of their misery.¹²¹ He observes that the psalmist makes a similar distinction when dealing with the subject of divine providence: that the righteous contemplates upon the many evident tokens of God's

¹¹⁶ *Inst.* 1.17.1 (210-211): "First, God's providence must be considered with regard to the future as well as the past. Secondly, it is the determinative principle of all things in such a way that sometimes it works through an intermediary, sometimes without an intermediary, sometimes contrary to every intermediary. Finally, it strives to the end that God may reveal his concern for the whole human race, but especially his vigilance in ruling the church, which he deigns to watch more closely." These are taken up in *Inst.* 1.17.3-5, 1.17.9, 1.17.6-8 and 1.17.10-11 respectively.

¹¹⁷ Bouwsma concurs when he writes: "What is indisputable is the importance Calvin attached to the doctrine [of providence] for the relief of anxiety. It comforted him to reflect that the power of God holds the universe in place, preserves its order, prevents it from sliding into the abyss." See William J Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 171. It is worth noting that this practical nature of divine providence is particularly evident in his letters. For samples of such letters, see Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 211-213; also, P E Hughes, "Calvin and the Church of England", in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, Ed. W Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 173-196.

¹¹⁸ *Inst.* 1.17.7 (219).

¹¹⁹ *Inst.* 1.17.11 (224).

¹²⁰ See *Inst.* 1.17.6-11 which deals essentially with this subject.

¹²¹ "Amid these tribulations must not man be most miserable... that misery which man will feel if he is brought under the sway of fortune". *Inst.* 1.17.10 (223).

superintending and overruling providence with “unfeigned delight; while the wicked remain perplexed and mute”.¹²² Indeed, it would seem that Calvin sees this contrasting response as definitive for the accuracy of one’s understanding of divine providence. He once cited the example of Brutus,¹²³ a Stoic, and concluded thus:

Some of the heathen philosophers discoursed upon, and maintained the doctrine of a Divine Providence; but it was evident from experience that they had notwithstanding no real and thorough persuasion of its truth; for when things fell out contrary to their expectation, they openly disavowed what they had previously professed.¹²⁴

While all men “acknowledge that the world is governed by the providence of God; but when there comes some sad confusion of things, which disturbs their ease, and involves them in difficulty, there are few who retain in their minds the firm persuasion of this truth.”¹²⁵

Given this negative response of the philosophers to adversity, it is not to be wondered that Calvin viewed them as fools. He once commented thus of philosophers, especially with regards to their view of divine providence:

¹²² *Comm. on Psa 107:42, CTS, 264.*

¹²³ “Of this we have a memorable example in Brutus. We can hardly conceive of a man surpassing him in courage, and all who intimately knew him bore testimony to his distinguished wisdom. Being of the sect of the Stoic philosophers, he spake many excellent things in commendation of the power and providence of God; and yet when at length vanquished by Antony, he cried out, that whatever he had believed concerning virtue had no foundation in truth, but was the mere invention of men, and that all the pains taken to live honestly and virtuously was only so much lost labour, since fortune rules over all the affairs of mankind. Thus this personate, who was distinguished for heroic courage, and an example of wonderful resolution, in renouncing virtue, and under the name of it cursing God, shamefully fell away. Hence it is manifest, how the sentiments of the ungodly fluctuate with the fluctuation of events.” *Comm. on Psa 73, CTS, 122-123.*

¹²⁴ *Comm. on Psa 73, CTS, 122.*

¹²⁵ *Comm. on Psa 11:4, CTS, 163.*

We are now informed that men begin to be wise when they turn their whole attention to the contemplation of the works of God, and that all others besides are fools. For however much they may pique themselves upon their superior acuteness and subtilty, all this is of no avail so long as they shut their eyes against the light which is presented to them. In employing this interrogatory form of address, he indirectly adverts to that false persuasion which prevails in the world, at the very time when the most daring heaven-despiser esteems himself to be the wisest of men; as if he should say, that all those who do not properly observe the providence of God, will be found to be nothing but fools. This caution is the more necessary, since we find that some of the greatest of philosophers were so mischievous as to devote their talents to obscure and conceal the providence of God, and, entirely overlooking his agency, ascribed all to secondary causes. At the head of these was Aristotle, a man of genius and learning; but being a heathen, whose heart was perverse and depraved, it was his constant aim to entangle and perplex God's overruling providence by a variety of wild speculations; so much so, that it may with too much truth be said, that he employed his naturally acute powers of mind to extinguish all light. Besides, the prophet not only condemns the insensate Epicureans, whose insensibility was of the basest character, but he also informs us that a blindness, still greater and more detestable, was to be found among these great philosophers themselves.¹²⁶

It is not surprising, therefore, that Calvin consider the chief fault of the philosophers as that of omitting what he terms "the most important truth of all", namely, that of God's providence.¹²⁷ They may assent to the concept

¹²⁶ *Comm. on Psa 107:43, CTS, 266.*

¹²⁷ "Here it must be apparent, as I already took occasion to observe, that the doctrine of this psalm is very different from that taught by the philosophers. I grant that they may have ridiculed worldly ambition with elegance and eloquence, exposed the other vices,

of divine providence, they may speculate and argue about it and write tomes on it. But at the end of the day, like Brutus the Stoic, they find no practical help for their frayed nerves because their concept of God and the God of providence is deficient. As Calvin so aptly put it at the end of his discussion of the practical nature of divine providence in the *locus classicus*:

In short, not to tarry any longer over this, if you pay attention, you will easily perceive that ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it.¹²⁸

So, for those four reasons stated above, Calvin denies that his concept of divine providence is the same as the Stoic's. First of all, the Stoic was guilty of a pantheistic conception of God and his providential activity. Secondly, the Stoic concept of providence is irrational. Thirdly, the Stoic idea of fate is meaningless because, contrary to Scripture, it is not personal and purposeful. Last of all, the Stoic idea of providence can only lead to utter despair.

IV. CONCLUSION

The general purpose of this chapter has been to delineate what, for Calvin, were some false views of God the Creator. As we noted earlier, Calvin considered all such views as arising from or resulting in idolatry. In treating both imaginative and concrete idolatry in *Inst.* 1.4-5 and *Inst.* 1.11-12 respectively, Calvin was attempting to remove all excuse from all idolators for continuing in their idolatry. That, as has already been suggested, may be the primary reason why Calvin moved his treatment

and insisted upon the topics of our frailty and mortality; but they uniformly omitted to state the most important truth of all, that God governs the world by his providence, and that we may expect a happy issue out of our calamities, by coming to that everlasting inheritance which awaits us in heaven." *Comm.* on Psa 49:14, CTS, 248-249.

¹²⁸ *Inst.* 1.17.11 (225).

on concrete idolatry in the 1543-1554 editions of the *Institutes* to Chapters 11-12 of the 1559 *Institutes*.¹²⁹

That Calvin moved his treatment of the doctrines of the Trinity, creation and providence from their respective positions in the 1539-1554 editions of the *Institutes* to Book 1 the 1559 *Institutes* is due primarily to the particular relation Calvin has observed between idolatry and each of these doctrines respectively. As the foregoing discussion has sought to establish, the doctrine of the Trinity was Calvin's singular reply to all the false views of God. Similarly, the movement of the chapters on creation and providence was in direct response to what Calvin saw was the logical corollary of idolatry, namely, the false views of creation and providence. It did not matter if these false views arose from erroneous concepts of God or *vice versa*. For Calvin, all three doctrines were of a piece. If one has a false view of God, then, obviously one's views of creation and providence will be false. But if one's concepts of creation and providence are in error, so too will one's concept of God be found erroneous.

That this is so is clearly evident from the foregoing discussion. For Calvin, while the Epicureans may not have denied the existence of God or the gods, they nevertheless implied the opposite by denying the Scriptural account of creation and providence. Concrete idolators may not have fallen into the error of the Epicureans in terms of their concept of creation. But in their worship of angels, they verged on a deistic conception of God and providence by attributing to angels a self-existence and independence which, according to Scripture, can only be true of God alone. The Stoics may have fared better than the Epicureans in their conception of providence. But they were guilty of confusing God with his creation and, in the process, of attributing the essence of God to nature or man. Not to be overlooked was the dualism of the Libertines who made the devil co-equal with God, resulting in a view of creation and providence which is not very unlike the pantheism of the Stoics.

What then is Calvin's reply to all these false views? It is basically

¹²⁹ See pages 99-100 of this chapter.

twofold.¹³⁰ First of all, Scripture reveals that God is both infinite and spiritual. As Calvin himself has suggested, this alone “ought to be enough, not only to banish popular delusions, but also to refute the subtleties of secular philosophy”.¹³¹ That God is infinite should warn those who are guilty of imaginative idolatry that they are but finite and therefore should keep within the bounds of their finiteness and not try to go beyond what their finite minds are incapable of, namely, to speculate about the nature of God.¹³² That God is spiritual should warn those who are guilty of concrete idolatry that “God's majesty is sullied by an unfitting and absurd fiction, when the incorporeal is made to resemble corporeal matter, the invisible a visible likeness, the spirit an inanimate object, the immeasurable a puny bit of wood, stone, or gold.”¹³³

But, secondly, Calvin says that the Scripture reveals God to be a Trinity. It must be noticed that in saying this, Calvin was not intending to diminish the Scriptural idea of the unity of God. Already in his introductory remark to *Inst.* 1.13 he has joined the two together: “the sole God” in “three persons”.¹³⁴ Throughout his treatment of the Trinity in *Inst.* 1.13, he was clearly concerned as well to stress the unity of the Godhead.¹³⁵ Indeed, it would appear that Calvin's primary concern throughout the chapters preceding *Inst.* 1.13 relates to the unity of God. This is demonstrated by the frequency with which Calvin uses phrases to indicate

¹³⁰ See pages 85-86 of this chapter.

¹³¹ *Inst.* 1.13.1 (120-121).

¹³² *Inst.* 1.13.1 (121): “Surely, his infinity ought to make us afraid to try to measure him by our own senses.”

¹³³ *Inst.* 1.11.2 (101). Cf. *Inst.* 1.13.1 (121): “Indeed, his spiritual nature forbids our imagining anything earthly or carnal of him.”

¹³⁴ *Inst.* 1.13.2 (122).

¹³⁵ Note, for instance, *Inst.* 1.13.16-20 where both the distinction and unity of the three persons are equally emphasised. Also, note the frequency of the following phrases: “one God”, *Inst.* 1.13.4 (125), 1.13.5 (126), 1.13.11 (135), 1.13.16 (140-141), 1.13.19 (143), 1.13.20 (144), 1.13.22 (147), 1.13.24 (153), 1.13.25 (154), 1.13.26 (154-155), 1.13.27 (156), 1.13.28 (157), 1.13.29 (158); “sole God”, 1.13.11 (135), 1.13.23 (149-150), 1.13.27 (156); and “only God”, 1.13.23 (149).

the oneness of God in Book 1,¹³⁶ as compared with the other books of the 1559 *Institutes*.¹³⁷ Not insignificantly, the phrase “one God” appears only once more in Book 1, after Chapter 13.¹³⁸ That it is so would suggest that Calvin’s main emphasis throughout the chapters preceding Chapter 13 is to demonstrate the pure monotheism of the Scriptures with respect to its concept of God the Creator as opposed to atheism, polytheism (as expressed in concrete idolatry), deism, dualism, and pantheism. The true God, according to the Scriptures, is one. He is the only God, the sole God and no other being or creature or thing can lay claim to an essence equal with him. So, while Calvin goes on to qualify what he deems to be the Scriptural concept of the one God by speaking of him as three persons, his emphasis on the oneness of the God cannot be overstated. It would seem that it is this oneness of God which pre-occupied his exposition in the first twelve chapters of the 1559 *Institutes*.

It must be apparent by now why Calvin finally located his treatment of divine providence in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. Calvin saw providence as integral to his exposition of the oneness of God as opposed to all the false views of God the Creator. Of course, providence was only one aspect of Calvin’s concern. His primary concern was the concept of God the Creator. But that embraces not merely God’s person but also his works of creation and providence. So while it cannot be said that providence is Calvin’s primary concern in Book 1, it is nonetheless a very important aspect of his whole treatment of God the Creator.

It is for this reason that any attempt to look at the God-concept Calvin employed for his doctrine of providence must take into serious

¹³⁶ For instance: “one God”, *Inst.* 1.4.3 (49), 1.5.6 (58), 1.5.13 (66), 1.10.3 (99), 1.11.10 (110), 1.12.1 (117), 1.12.3 (119); “single God”, 1.10.3 (99); “sole God”, 1.12.3 (120); “one and only true God”, 1.2.3 (42); “true and only God”, 1.5.13 (67); “one true God”, 1.6.2 (72).

¹³⁷ For instance, “one God” is found in *Inst.* 2.8.12 (378), 2.8.16 (382), 2.8.26 (392), 2.14.3 (486), 2.15.5 (501), 3.20.20 (877-878), 4.1.2 (1014), 4.1.7 (1021), 4.2.5 (1047), 4.3.1 (1054), 4.8.16 (1165), 4.18.19 (1446), 4.19.13 (1461).

¹³⁸ *Inst.* 1.14.2 (161): “For by this circumstance we are drawn away from all fictions to the one God who distributed his work into six days that we might not find it irksome to occupy our whole life in contemplating it.”

consideration the context within which it was finally located. As indicated above, Calvin's formal treatment of the concept of God the Creator is primarily confined to Chapter 1-13 of Book 1.¹³⁹ As such, any attempt to derive his God-concept for his discussion of providence from the *locus classicus* is bound to be both limited and superficial. And as a later chapter will demonstrate, this is one of the chief factors which has contributed towards the tendency of modern scholarship in misreading the God-concept employed by Calvin in his treatment of providence.

¹³⁹ Warfield is therefore only partially correct when he confines Calvin's actual formal treatment of God to Chapters 11-13 of Book 1. See Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 134.

CHAPTER FIVE

CALVIN ON SCRIPTURE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

If, as the previous chapter has demonstrated, the doctrines of God, creation and providence are all of a piece for Calvin within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*, it should not be surprising at all if his doctrine of Scripture should form an integral part of that piece, especially since Scripture, as is already evident, is so central to Calvin's exposition of the three previous doctrines. That this is the case has been widely recognised. Gamble argues cogently for the indispensability of Scripture to Calvin's exposition of the *duplex cognitio* in the 1559 *Institutes*.¹ Dowey considers *Inst.* 1.6-9 as one of the most fundamental sections of the *Institutes*.² Indeed, one need go no further for confirmation of the centrality of Scripture in Calvin's understanding of God the Creator than the titles he himself gave to Chapters 6, 10, 13 and 14 of Book 1.³

¹ Gamble, in acknowledging the increasing unanimity among Calvin scholars that the *duplex cognitio* is the controlling principle in Calvin's theology, concludes: "How is it that we know God and ourselves? We come to this knowledge through nature and the Bible, but here the Bible plays a particularly important role. The title of book 1, chapter 6 of the *Institutes* reads, 'Scripture Is Needed as Guide and Teacher for Anyone Who Would Come to God the Creator,' and the discussion of that whole chapter develops this theme. Calvin acknowledges no greater source of authority than the Bible." See Richard C Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988), 181. More recently, Torrance affirms the same (with specific reference to *Inst.* 1.13 especially): "Practically, Calvin says, this means that 'we must not be minded to inquire of God elsewhere than in his Sacred Word, or think anything of him except under the guidance of his Word, or to say anything of him except it is taken from the same Word'. It was in strict adherence to this fundamental principle that Calvin set out his doctrine of the Trinity in the *Institute of Christian Religion*." See Thomas F Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 11.

² Dowey concludes thus of this section: "Since the Scriptures contain not only the revelation of the Creator but also the redemptive Word, this section is fundamental, one of the most fundamental, of the whole *Institutes*." See Dowey, *op cit*, 87.

³ Chapter 6, "Scripture is needed as guide and teacher for anyone who would come to God the Creator"; Chapter 10, "Scripture, to correct all superstition, has set the true God alone over all the gods of the heathen"; Chapter 13, "In Scripture, from the creation onward, we are taught one essence of God, which contains Three Persons"; Chapter 14, "Even in the creation of the universe and of all things, Scripture by unmistakable marks distinguishes the true God from false gods".

It is somewhat disappointing, therefore, that Dowey should consider *Inst.* 1.7-9 as merely "an excursus or footnote" to *Inst.* 1.6.⁴ If Calvin's delineation of the false views of God in the previous chapter of this study is anything to go by, it can be safely assumed that *Inst.* 1.6-9 should somehow fit into that discussion and, thus, the *schema* Calvin intended for Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. The location of these chapters between his treatment of imaginative idolatry in *Inst.* 1.4-5 and concrete idolatry in *Inst.* 1.11-12, as such, should not be treated as merely a footnote. Rather, we should seek to discover how Calvin integrated the doctrine of Scripture into his treatment of the *duplex cognitio dei*.

Perhaps a preliminary suggestion may be ventured upon at this juncture. It would seem that in *Inst.* 1.6-9, Calvin had in mind various erroneous opinions about Scripture which have led to false views of God the Creator. Keeping in mind the various opponents Calvin touched upon in his delineation of the false views of God it is suggested here that *Inst.* 1.6 is aimed at those whom, like the philosophers, Calvin charged with imaginative idolatry in *Inst.* 1.4-5. In opposition to the philosophers' indulgence in human speculation about the person of God, Calvin insisted upon the necessity of the revelation of God provided in Scripture without which one cannot come to any true knowledge of God.⁵ *Inst.* 1.7 is clearly directed against the

⁴ Commenting on the following statement by Calvin in *Inst.* 1.7.1, "Before I proceed further, it is worth while to introduce some observations concerning the authority of Scripture, which will not only prepare our minds with reverence for it, but also will remove all doubt", Dowey writes: "The three all-important chapters on Scripture (I.vii-ix) appear, so far as the drift of the argument of the *Institutes* is concerned, as an excursus or a footnote to chapter vi." He even suggests that these chapters "could be dropped, assuming that the problem of the authority of Scripture were dealt with elsewhere, without affecting the course of the argument between vi and x." Dowey, *op cit*, 86-87. Was Battles guilty of the same when he writes, "Chapters vii-ix form an excursus on Biblical authority"? See, *Inst.* 1.7.1 (74), footnote 2.

⁵ Note Calvin's insistence throughout *Inst.* 1.6.1-4 that our knowledge of God can be found only in Scripture since it alone can communicate what the revelation in creation cannot. Note, also, Calvin's emphasis on the inability, on the one hand, and the sinfulness, on the other, of the human mind with respect to the knowledge of God as these seem to indicate that Calvin was dealing more with those who are guilty of imaginative idolatry: "Suppose we ponder how slippery is the fall of the human mind into forgetfulness of God, how great the tendency to every kind of error, how great the lust to fashion constantly new and artificial religions", 1.6.3 (72); "For since the human mind because of its feebleness can in no way attain to God unless it be aided and assisted by his Sacred Word...", 1.6.4 (74).

Romanists whom Calvin deemed as the main proponents of concrete idolatry in his day and who, in Calvin's view, undermined the authority of Scripture by subjecting the Scripture to the Church of Rome. In contrast, Calvin asserts the authority of the Scripture over the Church.⁶ Last, but not least, Calvin clearly intended *Inst.* 1.9 to oppose what he called the "fanatics" who reject Scripture altogether and claim, as it were, direct revelation from the Spirit of God. In reply, Calvin contends for the inseparability of the Word and the Spirit.⁷

A superficial reading of these chapters may suggest that Calvin's sole concern is to establish the authority of Scripture.⁸ After all, in *Inst.* 1.7 and *Inst.* 1.9, Calvin's main thrust seems to be to refute the two erroneous positions on the authority of Scripture held by the Romanists and the fanatics respectively.⁹ But the evidence will belie such a conclusion. For while,

⁶ Note the chapter title: "Scripture must be confirmed by the witness of the Spirit. Thus may its authority be established as certain; and it is a wicked falsehood that its credibility depends on the judgment of the Church".

⁷ Note the chapter title: "Fanatics, abandoning Scripture and flying over to revelation, cast down all the principles of godliness". Calvin's reply is clearly asserted in *Inst.* 1.9.2-3 (94-96) where he insists that the Spirit, being the Author of the Word must agree with the Word and, therefore, both Word and Spirit belong inseparably together.

⁸ Both Dowey and Battles implied as much when they refer to these chapters as dealing with the "problem of the authority of Scripture" or simply, "Biblical authority". See Dowey, *op cit*, 8 and Battles, *Inst.* 1.7.1 (74) respectively.

⁹ A N Lopes, basing much of his study on *Inst.* 1.7 and 1.9, has shown how Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit was shaped by his battle on these two fronts: "On one, he fought against the captivity of the Scriptures to the Roman Catholic Church, and on the other, against the abandonment of the Scriptures by the Radical Reformation." See, A N Lopes, "Calvin, Theologian of the Spirit; The Holy Spirit and the Word of God", in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 15 (1997), 42. It must be said that while Calvin recognises a distinction between the two, he nevertheless traces their errors to a common root, *Comm.* on John 16:14, CC, 121: "This error is followed by another, no less intolerable; that having said goodbye to Christ's law, as if His reign were ended, and He now is nothing at all, they substitute the Spirit in His place. From this source have flowed the sacrileges of the Papacy and Mohammedanism. For although those antichrists are dissimilar in many respects they have a common starting-point: that in the Gospel we are initiated into the true faith, but that the perfection of doctrine must be sought elsewhere to perfect us completely. If Scripture is brought against the Pope, he denies we should keep to it, since the Spirit has also now come and has lifted us above it by many additions. Mohammed proclaims that without his Koran men always remain children. Thus, by a false claim to the Spirit, the world has been bewitched to leave the simple purity of Christ. For as soon as the Spirit is severed from Christ's Word the door is open to all sorts of craziness and impostures. Many fanatics have tried a similar method of deception in our own age. The written teaching seems to them to be of the

admittedly, the authority of Scripture was Calvin's primary concern, it was not his sole or exclusive concern. There were other related issues, as we shall see, not least the perspicuity and the interpretation of Scripture and the close connection between them, and Calvin's discussion of piety and faith which, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, was so prominent in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*.¹⁰

The task of this chapter is to examine these latter aspects of Calvin's concern in his doctrine of Scripture, how they form an integral part of his discussion of the *duplex cognitio dei*, and what bearing they have on Calvin's account of divine providence. The specific emphasis on these aspects is not meant to detract from the authority of Scripture. Rather, it presupposes Calvin's full commitment to the formal principle of *sola scriptura*¹¹ and the following discussion proceeds upon that presupposition.

Why, then, the particular emphasis of this chapter? Several reasons may be adduced. First of all, while considerable scholarly attention has been given to the authority of Scripture in Calvin's discussion of the *duplex cognitio dei*,¹² the same attention has not been accorded to these other aspects of his doctrine of Scripture.¹³ And yet, as the rest of this chapter will

letter. Therefore they were pleased to make up a new theology consisting of revelations."

¹⁰ See Chapter 3 of this study.

¹¹ This has been recognised, for instance, by Berkouwer: "Nowhere was the relationship between the authority and interpretation so clearly expressed as in the Reformation confession of Scripture, which, based on *sola Scriptura*, offered a perspective on the real relationship between authority and interpretation, and expressed in its hermeneutical rule: *Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter)." See G C Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 127.

¹² See, for instance, Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 48-130; Dowey, *op cit*, 86-147; Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 72-96.

¹³ See, for example, the following by Richard C Gamble: "Brevitas et facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic", in *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985):1-17; "Exposition and Method in Calvin", in *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987):153-185; "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?", in *Calvin Theological Journal* 23 (1988):178-194. T H L Parker's two ground-breaking works on Calvin's exegetical method, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1971) and *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), while monumental, are limited in scope and do not include an examination of the 1559 *Institutes*. T F Torrance's *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*

demonstrate, Calvin's discussion of the authority of Scripture is closely related to these other aspects and they together form an integral part of his discussion on the *duplex cognitio dei*. Secondly, the problem of hermeneutics featured prominently in Calvin's account of God the Creator and, therefore, the God of providence. This is evident from Calvin's exposé of the defective hermeneutics of the Manichees and Anthropomorphites when he introduced his discussion of the Trinity in *Inst.* 1.13.¹⁴ Indeed, many of Calvin's introductory remarks in *Inst.* 1.13 relate precisely to the question of hermeneutics.¹⁵ It would seem, therefore, that Calvin sees a close relationship between hermeneutics and the theological formulation of his doctrine of the Trinity and, thus, his doctrine of God. Since Calvin places his discussion of providence within a Trinitarian context, this relationship between hermeneutics and the theological formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity has ramifications for his concept of the God of providence.¹⁶ It cannot be overlooked, as well, that Calvin's discussion of hermeneutics is integral to his treatment of providence. This is evident both from the way in which he approaches the subject of divine providence in the *locus classicus* and his providence-related controversial writings. An instance of the latter is his controversy with the Libertines where the problem of hermeneutics featured prominently.¹⁷ It should not be forgotten that the Libertines were the fanatics referred to in *Inst.* 1.9. In fact the hermeneutical problem appears

(Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988) is devoted more to an examination of the scholastic influence upon Calvin's hermeneutics than to the precise issue of the hermeneutical problem we wish to address in this Chapter.

¹⁴ "Indeed, that they (the Manichees) dared abuse certain testimonies of Scripture was due to base ignorance; just as the error itself sprang from execrable madness. The Anthropomorphites, also, who imagined a corporeal God from the fact that Scripture ascribes to him a mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet, are easily refuted." *Inst.* 1.13.1 (121).

¹⁵ Calvin devotes *Inst.* 1.13.2-6 to the whole question of the admissibility or inadmissibility of certain terms within his hermeneutics in his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity.

¹⁶ This has already been suggested in Chapter 2, page 45ff. of this study. The next chapter will discuss this more fully and comprehensively.

¹⁷ Chapters 7-10 of his treatise, *Against the Libertines*, are devoted to the "spiritualistic" tendency of the Libertines' hermeneutics.

consistently on Calvin's agenda in most of his providence-related controversial writings. A careful examination of these will highlight how Calvin integrated the hermeneutical concern into his exposition of providence and the God of providence. Thirdly, it should be noted that in these same controversial writings, Calvin is not dealing so much with opponents who question the authority of Scripture but rather opponents who claim to recognise that same authority as he did.¹⁸ As such, instead of laying claim to the authority of Scripture, Calvin sought to demonstrate the defective hermeneutics of his opponents by a detailed examination of the proof-texts supplied by them. Fourthly, there is Calvin's overriding concern for piety and faith in one's hermeneutics. Calvin insists that without piety and faith, even if one had the Scripture and held to the authority, for that matter, to the perspicuity of Scripture, one could never come to the knowledge of the true God. For all these reasons, therefore, these other but related aspects of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture cannot be ignored.

The task, then, of the next three sections is to clarify the relationship between Calvin's hermeneutics and his commitment to the authority of Scripture, and to demonstrate the importance of his hermeneutics to his theological method. Specific examples of Calvin's hermeneutical method in his exposition of divine providence is deferred to the end of this chapter so as to avoid unnecessary repetition.

I. THE HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM IN CONTEXT

As the above discussion has suggested, with respect to the authority of Scripture, Calvin was confronted generally with two errors: one arising from the Romanists and the other from the fanatics. However, on the question of hermeneutics, the situation, according to Calvin, was somewhat different. For instance, in his treatise against the Anabaptists, Calvin noted

¹⁸ Calvin once noted that Georghiuss the Sicilian went so far as to claim that "Christ had appeared to him and appointed him interpreter of all Scripture". See, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 54. Evidently, then, Calvin was up against opponents who claim that their interpretation was more true to Scripture than his own.

the different positions held by the Anabaptists and Libertines on the authority of Scripture. The former, Calvin says, receive the holy Scripture¹⁹ while the latter reject the authority of Scripture altogether.²⁰ That, however, does not mean Calvin had nothing against the Anabaptists. Rather, as Farley pointed out, Calvin had great difficulty with their hermeneutical method which lacked any normative principle and, thereby, permitted them to draw conclusions contrary to Scripture.²¹ This clearly undermined the authority of Scripture and, as Calvin observed, it also revealed that their so-called commitment to the authority of Scripture is nothing more than a pretext to seduce believers.²² Interestingly enough, Calvin's assessment of the Libertines' approach in winning adherents is not dissimilar. While, admittedly, they reject the authority of Scripture, they nevertheless realised that such outright rejection would not win them adherents from among Christians. So, as Calvin put it, "they decided to operate more covertly"²³ by changing the true

¹⁹ *John Calvin: Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, trans. Benjamin Wirt Farley, with Introduction and Notes (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1982), 39: "The first, although it is full of many perverse and pernicious errors, falls within the bounds of a greater simplicity. For at least this sect receives the holy Scripture, as do we. And if we dispute with its members, we can perceive in what we differ from them and the meaning they give to their conceptions. In sum, we can see where we agree with them and where controversy remains."

²⁰ "The second is a labyrinth, without parallel, of so many absurd views that it is a marvel how creatures who bear the human figure can be so void of sense and reason as to be so duped and fall victim to such brutish fantasies. This sect is called the Libertines. And they so imitate the Spirituals that they no more esteem the holy Word of God than they do fables, except when it suits them and when they can change it by force to serve their diabolic opinions. Besides, they mumble a jargon, somewhat in the way that wandering mendicants do, which no one can interpret nor they themselves understand, unless they intend by such a device to cover up the turpitude of their doctrine." See, *ibid*, 39-40.

²¹ See Farley's introductory comments, *ibid*, 26.

²² "It is, therefore, with deception that they abuse this pretext, making the simple believe that they wish to be governed totally according to Scripture. For they do not hold to it whatsoever, but only to the fantasy of their brain." *Ibid*, 43. "Now inasmuch as there is no fairer guise for seducing poor Christians, who are zealous to follow God, than to quote God's Word, the Anabaptists, against whom we are currently writing, always preface their remarks by this pretext." *Ibid*, 42.

²³ *Against the Libertines*, 198.

meaning of Scripture into allegories.²⁴ So, while Calvin's assessment of the Anabaptists' errors may not be as scathing as that of the Libertines',²⁵ and while he recognises the significant difference between the two on the question of the authority of Scripture, he nevertheless lumps them together in their method of winning adherents.

No less significant is Calvin's conclusion as to the exact method by which they do so. In both cases, it was a question of hermeneutics. In Calvin's view, the Anabaptists expound their texts so improperly as to complicate a true exposition.²⁶ He accuses them of being guilty of allegorical interpretation,²⁷ of proof-texting,²⁸ and of taking a text out of its context.²⁹ As for the Libertines, Calvin noted that in pursuing their emphasis on the authority of direct revelation of the Spirit over and against Scripture, they proposed two hermeneutical principles:

²⁴ *Against the Libertines*, 222: "Now when they saw that all true believers considered it a detestable sacrilege to trample the sacred Word of God under foot, in accordance with their article of faith that permits them to speak with a double tongue, they put on that tight-fitting garment under which they currently hide. They did this to give the impression that they accepted holy Scripture, but in accepting it they turned it [to their advantage] after the example of their predecessors, the Priscillianists, of whom we have spoken, and changed it into allegories." Cf. *ibid*, 221: "We have already said that from the very beginning the Libertines scoffed whenever anyone quoted Scripture to them, not concealing the fact that they accepted it as fable. Nevertheless they readily made use of it when they found a passage they could turn to their advantage. But this did not mean that they believed in it. They did it only to trouble the simple and to unsettle them in order to win them more easily".

²⁵ Note Farley's observation of this in *John Calvin: Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, 30.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁷ "I am quite familiar with the ruse that the Anabaptists invent here, taking allegorically the name 'children' to mean those who are 'children of malice' and not 'children in age'. Consequently they mock us for being so simple as to take this reference literally." *Ibid*, 51.

²⁸ "Interweaving different points, they cite only fragments of Scripture. And they are so pleased with this [approach] that they make themselves believe that there is far more majesty in speaking this grossly than there is in developing their case in an orderly manner." *Ibid*, 156.

²⁹ See, *ibid*, 95-100, where Calvin discredits their exegesis of Matthew 5:33-37 on the grounds that they neglected the "occasion" of the context.

First of all [they mean] that one should not hold to the simple sense of Scripture, but one should play around with it by means of allegorical interpretation. Second, [they mean] that one should not be content with what is written, or acquiesce in it at all, but one should speculate higher and look for new revelations.³⁰

Calvin's critique above, however, is not confined to the Anabaptists and Libertines. While recognising the difference between the Romanists and the Libertines,³¹ Calvin cannot help noticing that on the hermeneutical problem they were in reality the same. He remarks:

Although this sect [i.e., the Libertines] is certainly different from the papists', inasmuch as it is a hundred times worse and more pernicious, nevertheless both of them together hold this principle in common: to change Scripture into allegories and to long for a better and more perfect wisdom than we find in it. And together both as a cover-up appeal to Saint Paul's statement that "the letter kills" (II Cor. 3:6).³²

If the Libertines and Romanists were one in their hermeneutical method, then, according to Calvin, the Anabaptists and Romanists were one

³⁰ *Against the Libertines*, 222. Cf., *ibid*, 198: "For example, in order not to be seen to be rejecting Scripture, they have changed it into allegories, going out of their way to find obscure meanings, turning a man into a horse and a cloud into a lantern's horns... We shall examine how they manage to twist and turn the scriptures by such allegories."

³¹ "For even the pope retains some form of religion. He does not remove hope in eternal life. He teaches the fear of God. He observes some distinction between good and evil. He recognises our Lord Jesus as true God and true man. He attributes authority to the Word of God. But the goal of Quintin and his gang is to turn heaven and earth upside down, to annihilate all religion, to efface all knowledge of human understanding, to deaden consciences, and to leave no distinction between men and beasts." See, *Against the Libertines*, 204. Calvin's acknowledgement of the pope's recognition of the authority of Scripture here must be qualified, as evidence elsewhere indicates that this is merely a recognition of Scripture as a secondary authority. For the papists, the primary authority still lies with the Church. However, for Calvin, the fact that they attribute a degree of authority to Scripture is certainly better than the total rejection of Scripture by the Libertines.

³² *Against the Libertines*, 222.

in the result of their hermeneutical method. Castigating the Anabaptists for the way in which they have troubled the Church by their covert undermining of the authority of Scripture,³³ Calvin goes on to add:

Moreover, on several principal points of Christianity, they agree closely with the papists, holding a view directly repugnant to all the holy Scripture – as with free will, predestination, and the cause of our salvation.³⁴

Thus, despite their differing positions on the authority of Scripture, the errors promoted by the Romanists, Anabaptists and Libertines, in Calvin's opinion, seem to arise from one common source: their defective hermeneutical method.³⁵

The problem of hermeneutics is also highlighted in Calvin's critique of Castellio in *The Secret Providence of God*. The treatise is especially significant since each lay claim to promoting the Scriptural doctrine of God and accused each other for precisely the opposite. In his examination of Calvin's doctrine of God, Castellio had concluded that "that God which nature, reason, and the Holy Scriptures teach, is plainly contrary to this God of Calvin".³⁶ Calvin countered by charging Castellio with exalting common sense and human reason above Holy Scriptures.³⁷ In support of his counter-

³³ "For a long time now we have laboured continually [to support] that the holy Word should be returned to a place of preeminence, and we have undertaken a battle against all the world to achieve this. But they, what have they done to advance this, or in what way have they helped? Rather, to the contrary, they have impeded and troubled us, to such an extent that one cannot say wherein they have profited, unless it lies in deferring to that Word once it had been advanced by us." See, *John Calvin: Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, 43.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 43.

³⁵ Note how in every case, Calvin pinpoints their error as due in part to *allegorical* interpretation. This shall be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

³⁶ *The Secret Providence of God*, 336. Cf. *ibid*, 264-265, where Castellio accuses Calvin's doctrine as contrary to nature, and contrary to the Scripture.

³⁷ Calvin writes: "On the direct contrary, you would have human reason and common sense to form a judgment of the great and adorable God", *ibid*, 340. Cf. *ibid*, 341-343,

claim, Calvin puts Castellio's hermeneutics under the spotlight. For instance, he accuses his opponent of not keeping the text within its context,³⁸ of neglecting the immediate context, and of not giving the proper attention to parallel passages in Scripture.³⁹ Calvin also refuses Castellio's use of analogies which conflict with Scriptural analogies.⁴⁰ While it is not within the scope of this study to examine in detail the above charge and counter-charge, it is nevertheless important to note that Calvin's primary concern in his critique of Castellio relates to the hermeneutical problem in the theological formulation of the doctrine of God and that within the discussion of divine providence. It thus brings to the fore not only the correlation between Calvin's exegetical method and theological method but also his

where Calvin provides a full statement of this charge against Castellio.

³⁸ Castellio had quoted 1 Tim 2:4 in support of his assertion that since God does not will that anyone should perish, therefore, God must love all men and cannot have created anyone for perdition. In response, Calvin wrote: "And as to the your usual way of citing that passage of the apostle Paul, 'That God would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim 2:4), how vain a prop that is to put under your error to support it, I think I have shown with sufficient plainness already, and that repeatedly. For it is (so to speak) more certain than certainty itself that the apostle is not, in that passage, speaking of individuals at all, but of orders of men in their various civil and national vocations. He had just before commanded that the public prayers of the Church should be offered up for kings and others in authority, and for all who held magisterial offices, of what kind and degree soever they may be. But as nearly all those who were then armed with the sword of public justice were open and professed enemies of the Church, and as it might therefore seem to the Church singular or absurd that public prayers should be offered up for them, the apostle meets all objections, so very natural, by admonishing the Church to pray even for them also, and to supplicate God to extend His grace and favour even to them, for the Church's quiet, peace and safety." See, *The Secret Providence of God*, 275-276. Cf. Calvin's comments on Romans 9:15, *ibid*, 282-283.

³⁹ Commenting on 2 Pet 3:9, Calvin wrote: "And if there be anything in the first member of the passage that seems difficult of comprehension at first sight, it is made perfectly plain by the explanation which follows. For, in as far as God 'willeth that all should come unto repentance', in so far He willeth that no one should perish; but, in order that they thus be received of God, they must 'come'. But the Scripture everywhere affirms, that in order that they may 'come', they must be prevented of God; that is, God must come first to them to draw them; for until they are drawn of God, they will remain where they are, given up to the obstinacy of the flesh. *Ibid*, 276. Similarly, Calvin cited Dan 4:35 and Rom 11:32 as parallel passages in support of his interpretation of Romans 9:15. *Ibid*, 282.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 267-271. Helm has shown how this "is part of Calvin's general argument against common sense, and human reason (in the sense of what appears reasonable to the average person)". See, Paul Helm, "Calvin (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence", *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), 393-394.

hermeneutical concern and his doctrine of God. For him, the erroneous views of God conceived by his opponents arise quite simply because their hermeneutical method was defective. Just as important is this: a defective hermeneutic cannot but undermine the authority of Scripture itself. For with so many differing views one could not then determine with any certainty what Scripture teaches about the nature of God. If so, how can one be certain of Scripture itself and what it teaches eventually?

II. THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE

Calvin's response to the hermeneutical problem is in one sense simple and yet profound. He maintains that Scripture is perspicuous and that perspicuity applies to its teaching on the nature of God as to every other aspect of Christian doctrine. Indeed, the primary reason why Calvin constantly appeals to Scripture as the authority for all doctrine is simply this: Scripture is clear and unambiguous in what it teaches. Therefore, we can depend upon its authority.

That this is so with respect to the doctrine of God as found in Scripture is affirmed by Calvin in his introductory remarks in *Inst.* 1.6. Comparing Scripture to a pair of spectacles, he writes, "...so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God".⁴¹ Scripture is a more direct and certain mark whereby God is to be recognised.⁴² Not only is God made manifest to us; we are also informed by Scripture as to what we ought to think of him so that we are not misled to seek some uncertain deity.⁴³ Again, "Scripture adorns with unmistakable marks and tokens the one true God, in that he has created and governs the universe, in order that he may not be mixed up with the throng of false gods".⁴⁴ As such, we "must come...

⁴¹ *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70).

⁴² *Inst.* 1.6.1 (70).

⁴³ *Inst.* 1.6.1 (71).

⁴⁴ *Inst.* 1.6.2 (72).

to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from his works, while these very works are appraised not by our depraved judgment but by the rule of eternal truth".⁴⁵ There can, therefore, be no question at all that the perspicuity of Scripture is an objective reality with Calvin. As far as he is concerned, the Scriptural revelation of God and of his nature is clear, manifest, and unmistakable.

This perspicuity of Scripture, for Calvin, finds its foundation in God's own accommodation to human capacity.⁴⁶ The principle of accommodation is necessitated by the fact that God is infinite and man is finite; and if man is to know anything at all about God, then, in revealing himself God has to accommodate himself to man's finite capacity. Calvin saw God accommodating himself in the giving of Scripture.⁴⁷ Indeed, as Battles has so ably shown,

For Calvin, the understanding of God's accommodation to the limits and needs of the human condition was a central feature of the interpretation of Scripture and of the entire range of his theological work.⁴⁸

This accommodation on the part of God, however, must not be taken to

⁴⁵ *Inst.* 1.6.3 (73).

⁴⁶ Helm has helpfully defined "accommodation" as "the need for God to address men and women in terms that they can understand and respond to". See Helm, *The Providence of God*, 52. It should be pointed out that accommodation was a device used by the early Church fathers. See, Ford Lewis Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity", *Interpretation* 31 (1977), 22-26, for numerous examples of its use by the early Church fathers. In that sense, Calvin was no innovator. He, however, broke new ground by making this principle of accommodation a consistent basis of handling not only Scripture but of every avenue of relationship between God and man in a way the early Church fathers did not.

⁴⁷ *Sermon* on Job 33:14-17 (583): "For (as it hath been said) God in setting forth his word unto us, hath a regard of our capacity which is very slender..." Battles, *ibid*, 34ff. See also Gamble, "Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?", 48ff.

⁴⁸ Battles, *ibid*, 19. For more recent discussions, see David F Wright, "Calvin's Pentateuchal Criticism: Equity, Hardness of Heart, and Divine Accommodation in the Mosaic Harmony Commentary", *Calvin Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 33-50; Paul Helm, "John Calvin on Divine Accommodation", *Baptist Review of Theology* 4 (1994): 41-53.

mean that human beings can have no authentic knowledge of God at all unless he condescends to speak to us in human-like or anthropomorphic terms.⁴⁹ “For,” as Helm has observed, “there is much in the writings of Calvin to show that he took the opposite view. The very fact that he regards certain expressions as divine *accommodations* implies that it is possible to think of God in ways which are exact and unaccommodated.”⁵⁰

What is of particular interest for our purpose here are two consequences of Calvin’s principle of accommodation for his hermeneutical method. First of all, the fact that God has to accommodate himself to our capacity implies that there is a limitation to what we can know about him. The nature of accommodation itself presupposes that human capacity can only cope with so much knowledge of God and no more: thus, the necessity for accommodation.⁵¹ In refuting the Anthropomorphites’ view of a corporeal God, Calvin argues that “as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us” and in doing so accommodates the knowledge of himself to our slight capacity.⁵² This necessarily puts a limit upon what we may know of God from Scripture since he has not

⁴⁹ Helm has warned against such a conclusion: “So in highlighting the place of divine accommodation Calvin is not claiming that we will not be able to speak of or understand God at all unless he accommodates himself to our understanding and refers to himself in human-like, activistic and inter-activistic ways. According to Calvin, some human language about God is exact. Unlike such metaphorical or analogical expression, such exact language does not require qualification.” See Helm, “John Calvin on Divine Accommodation”, 45. Cf. Helm, *The Providence of God*, 53; Gamble, “Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?”, 48–49.

⁵⁰ Helm, *The Providence of God*, 53.

⁵¹ Gamble observes: “Can we, in Calvin’s view, completely understand God in himself? We certainly know him through his creation and especially in his Son, Jesus Christ; but face-to-face conversation such as Adam enjoyed in the garden and Moses on the mountain is not accorded us. Even if such possibilities were granted us, God would still be condescending to us, speaking to us in a language we understood but not revealing himself in all of his glory. Given the ‘accommodating’ nature of God’s revelation, we can never fully understand all the mysteries of God.” See Gamble, “Calvin as Theologian and Exegete: Is There Anything New?”, 48.

⁵² *Inst.* 1.13.1 (121). Cf. *The Secret Providence of God*, 254: “It is no matter of wonder that God, when speaking with men, should accommodate Himself to the limits of their comprehension. Who will affirm that God ever appeared to His servants, even in visions, such as he really is? For the brightness of His glory is such, that the sight of Him as he is, by our naked vision, would absorb and overwhelm all our senses in a moment. He has, therefore, ever so revealed Himself as men were able to bear that revelation.”

revealed everything about himself even in Scripture. Perhaps the outstanding example of this consequence for Calvin's hermeneutic is found in his reluctance to speculate on the essence of God. God's essence is incomprehensible.⁵³ As such, it is not ours to speculate upon it nor even investigate into it; rather it is ours to simply adore him.⁵⁴ Nowhere has Calvin stated this hermeneutical limit more clearly than when he was treating the doctrine of the Trinity:

Here, indeed, if anywhere in the secret mysteries of Scripture, we ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation; let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. For how can the human mind measure off the measureless essence of God according to its own little measures, a mind as yet unable to establish for certain the nature of the sun's body, though men's eyes daily gaze upon it? Indeed, how can the mind by its own leading come to search out God's essence when it cannot even get to its own? Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself. For, as Hilary says, he is the one fit witness to himself, and is not known except through himself.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Inst.* 1.5.1 (52): "Indeed, his essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception." Cf. *Comm.* on Gen 3:8, CTS, 161: "For, since he is in himself incomprehensible, he assumes, when he wishes to manifest himself to men, those marks by which he may be known." Helm has made the same point in relation to the knowledge God has: "Thus, according to Calvin, while we can understand that God literally knows, we cannot fully comprehend all aspects of God's infinite knowledge." See Helm, "John Calvin on Divine Accommodation", 45.

⁵⁴ *Calvin's Catechism of 1538*, Section 3: "Now since God's majesty in itself far outstrips the capacity of human understanding and cannot even be comprehended by it at all, it is fitting for us to adore rather than to investigate its loftiness, lest we be utterly overwhelmed by such great splendour." See, I John Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 8. Cf. Calvin, *The Secret Providence of God*, 254: "In a word, wherever the apostle sets forth the wonderful judgments of God, and the depth of His thoughts and ways, which are 'past finding out', he is not speaking at all of the works of the law, which stand always plain before our eyes; he is rather magnifying that inaccessible light in which is hidden God's *secret counsel*, which, being exalted far above the utmost stretch of the human mind, we are compelled to gaze upon with uplift eyes and to adore."

⁵⁵ *Inst.* 1.13.21 (146).

But this limitation, however, does not mean God cannot be known at all. Though God's essence is incomprehensible and the finite human mind cannot fathom God as he is in himself, Scripture nevertheless provides accurate knowledge of God, limited though that may be.⁵⁶ Within the context of the above statement, while Calvin accepts the difficulty of understanding the Trinity,⁵⁷ he nevertheless is committed to the perspicuity of Scripture with regards to its revelation of God.⁵⁸ That explains why Calvin still insists upon the necessity of seeking God out in the Scripture alone and in doing so, he affirms the principle of *sola scriptura*.⁵⁹ Indeed, Calvin insists upon such a simplicity in the Scriptural revelation of God that even the simplest folks can discern who that God is. This simplicity has been clearly spelled out by Calvin in his "Prefatory Address to King Francis" in the 1536 *Institutes*. In refuting the charge that Reformed teaching was contrary to the teaching of the early Church fathers, Calvin mentions a series of teaching promoted by his antagonists which were

⁵⁶ Put in another way, "We apprehend that we cannot *fully* understand that revelation, although we certainly can understand it." See Gamble, *ibid*, 49.

⁵⁷ *Inst.* 1.13.21 (146-147): "But if some distinction does exist in the one divinity of Father, Son, and Spirit – something hard to grasp – and occasions to certain minds more difficulty and trouble than is expedient, let it be remembered that men's minds, when they indulge their curiosity, enter into a labyrinth. And so let them yield themselves to be ruled by the heavenly oracles, even though they may fail to capture the height of the mystery."

⁵⁸ Referring to the preceding statement, "Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself", Calvin goes on to add: "But we shall be 'leaving it to him' if we conceive him to be as he reveals himself to us, without inquiring about him elsewhere than from his Word." *Inst.* 1.13.21 (146). Cf. *Inst.* 1.14.4 (160-161): "In short, let us remember that that invisible God, whose wisdom, power, and righteousness are incomprehensible, sets before us Moses' history as a mirror in which his living likeness glows. For just as eyes, when dimmed with age or weakness or by some other defect, unless aided by spectacles, discern nothing distinctly; so, such is our feebleness, unless Scripture guides us in seeking God, we are immediately confused."

⁵⁹ *Inst.* 1.13.21 (146): "And let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word." Cf. *Inst.* 1.13.4 (124): "For I do not feel that concerning God we should speak with less conscientiousness than we should think... Yet some measure ought to be preserved: we ought to seek from Scripture a sure rule for both thinking and speaking, to which both the thoughts of our minds and the words of our mouths should be conformed."

in direct contradiction to the teaching of the same fathers.⁶⁰ He then concludes with the observation that while “the fathers with one heart have abhorred and with one voice have detested the fact that God’s Holy Word has been contaminated by the subtleties of the sophists and involved in the squabbles of the dialecticians”, his antagonists “attempt nothing in life but to enshroud and obscure the simplicity of Scripture with endless contentions and worse than sophistic brawls”.⁶¹ In stating the difference between the two, Calvin was implying that he himself was committed, as the early Church fathers were (despite all their faults),⁶² to the *simplicity* of Scripture. After all simplicity lies at the heart of God’s intended language for Scripture itself.⁶³ Furthermore, God often employed uneducated people to write Scripture.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Inst.*, “Prefatory Address to King Francis”, 18-23.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 22.

⁶² Calvin’s attitude towards the fathers is described by himself in the same prefatory address as follows: “Now, these fathers have written many wise and excellent things. Still, what commonly happens to men has befallen them too, in some instances.” *Ibid*, 18. Cf. *Comm.* on 1 Cor 3:15, CC, 77-78: “There is no doubt that Paul is speaking of those who, while always retaining the foundation, mix hay with gold, stubble with silver, wood with precious stones. In other words, they build on Christ, but because of the weakness of the flesh they give way to some human viewpoint, or through ignorance they turn aside to some extent from the strict purity of the Word of God. Many of the saints were like that, Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine and others. You can also add, if you like, from those nearer our own day, Gregory and Bernard, and others like them, whose purpose it was to build on Christ, but who, however, often turned away from the right method of building.” Also, *Comm.* on Ezek 20:18-19, CTS, 310: “Hence the traditions of the fathers must be examined... If we discover that they have no other tendency than to pure worship of God, we may embrace them; but if they draw us away from the pure and simple worship of God, if they infect true and sincere religion by their own mixtures, we must utterly reject them.” For a fair consideration of Calvin’s attitude towards and use of the fathers, see A N S Lane, “Calvin’s Use of the Fathers and the Medievals”, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 16 (1981): 149-205.

⁶³ *Inst.* 1.8.1 (82): “For it was also not without God’s extraordinary providence that the sublime mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven came to be expressed largely in mean and lowly words, lest, if they had been adorned with more shining eloquence, the impious would scoffingly have claimed that its power is in the realm of eloquence alone. Now since such uncultivated and almost rude simplicity inspires greater reverence for itself than any eloquence, what ought one to conclude except that the force of the truth of Sacred Scripture is manifestly too powerful to need the art of words?”

⁶⁴ *Inst.* 1.8.11 (91): “Matthew, previously tied to the gain of his table, Peter and John going about in their boats – all of them rude, uneducated men – had learned nothing in the school of men that they could pass on to others... Yet the truth cries out openly that these men who, previously contemptible among common folk, suddenly began to discourse so gloriously of the heavenly mysteries...”

Calvin's commitment to the simplicity of Scripture is based upon such Scriptural facts and it forms the second consequence of his principle of divine accommodation.

It is no accident, therefore, that Calvin should consistently hold these two consequences of divine accommodation in tension.⁶⁵ While his essence is incomprehensible, God has nevertheless engraved unmistakable marks of his glory upon his works which are "so clear and prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance".⁶⁶ Scripture "customarily speaks in the manner of the common folk, where it would distinguish the true God from the false" by contrasting him with idols.⁶⁷ Moses, following the example of God himself, accommodated his record of the history of creation to "the rudeness of the common folk".⁶⁸ When speaking of the angels, he did so "after the manner of the common people", thus conveying "plainly and explicitly what Scripture elsewhere repeatedly teaches about them".⁶⁹ The aim, therefore, of the principle of divine accommodation is not merely so that God can "represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us"; it is also to ensure "that we may

⁶⁵ "When he names 'measures', which are used by men in very small matters, he accommodates himself to our ignorance; for thus does the Lord often prattle with us, and borrow comparisons from matters that are familiar to us, when he speaks of his majesty: that our ignorant and limited minds may better understand his greatness and excellence. Away, then, with all gross conceptions of God; for his greatness far exceeds all creatures, so that heaven, and earth, and sea, and all that they contain, however vast may be their extent, yet in comparison of him are nothing." *Comm.* on Isa 40:12, CTS, 218.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* 1.5.1 (52).

⁶⁷ *Inst.* 1.11.1 (99-100).

⁶⁸ *Inst.* 1.14.3 (162). Cf. *Comm.* on Gen 6:14, CTS, 256-257: "I grant what they allege, that Moses, who had been educated in all the science of the Egyptians, was not ignorant of geometry; but since we know that Moses everywhere spoke in a homely style to suit the capacity of people, and that he purposely abstained from acute disputations... I can by no means persuade myself, that, in this place, contrary to his ordinary method, he employed geometrical subtlety. Certainly in the first chapter, he did not treat scientifically of the stars, as a philosopher would do; but he called them, in a popular manner, according to their appearance to the uneducated... 'two great lights'".

⁶⁹ *Inst.* 1.14.3 (162).

understand it".⁷⁰

It is this commitment of Calvin to the simplicity of Scripture which distinguishes Calvin's hermeneutical method from that of his antagonists. For example, it explains, on the one hand, why Calvin is committed to the literal interpretation of Scripture⁷¹ and why he opposed the allegorical interpretation adopted by the Romanists, Anabaptists and Libertines, on the other.⁷² This antipathy towards allegorical interpretation⁷³ is especially evident in his commentaries⁷⁴ and is best expressed in the following citation taken from his comments on Gal. 4:22:

Origen, and many others along with him,⁷⁵ have seized this

⁷⁰ *Inst.* 1.17.13 (227). Cf. *Inst.* 2.16.2 (504): "Expressions of this sort have been accommodated to our capacity that we may *better understand* how miserable and ruinous our condition is apart from Christ." Also, *Against the Libertines*, Chapter 6 (214-215): "Thus He accommodates Himself to our smallness. And as a wet nurse coos to her baby, so He uses toward us an unrefined way of speaking in order to be *understood*." [Italics for emphasis, mine].

⁷¹ Gamble has suggested: "It is perhaps for his implementation of allegorical exegesis that Luther is not even mentioned by Calvin in the Romans introduction, although Luther's implementation of allegory is a subject of debate." See Gamble, "Exposition and Method", 162. But as Gerrish has so ably demonstrated, "Luther's exegetical principles saved him from the pitfalls of allegorism and, consequently, from the temptation to annul the 'formal principle' by fanciful 'eisegesis' of his own convictions." Gerrish goes on to provide the five main exegetical principles of Luther, the first of which is "the literal meaning is to be preferred to the allegorical when we are seeking to establish points of doctrine." See B A Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and the Continental Reformation", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 10 (1957), 346-348. Cf. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, 128-129; Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 197-200.

⁷² That Calvin opposed their allegorical interpretation is already evident on pages 128-130 of this chapter.

⁷³ Murray has observed that "at the outset of his work as a commentator, he [i.e. Calvin] has not only indicated his breach with the tradition of allegorical interpretation, but he has inveighed against it as a sacrilege... In the Reformation period Calvin's commentaries are the prime example of emancipation from a hermeneutic that made it possible to turn Scripture in any way men pleased." See John Murray, "Calvin as Theologian and Expositor", in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Volume 1 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 310.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, *Comm.* on Gen 6:14, CTS, 257-258; Exod 28:2-4, CTS, 195-196; Lev 11:9, CTS, 65-66; Deut 12:4, CTS, 130; Zech 6:1, CTS, 140; 2 Cor 3:6, CC, 41-43; Gal 4:22, CC, 84-85.

⁷⁵ Patristic interpretation in the 4th and 5th centuries AD has generally been divided into

occasion of twisting Scripture this way and that, away from the genuine sense (*a genuino sensu*). For they inferred that the literal sense is too meagre and poor and that beneath the bark of the letter there lie deeper mysteries which cannot be extracted but by hammering out allegories. And this they did without difficulty, for the world always has and always will prefer speculations which seem ingenious, to solid doctrine. With such approbation the licence increased more and more, so that he who played this game of allegorizing Scripture not only was suffered to pass unpunished but even obtained the highest applause. For many centuries no man was thought clever who lacked the cunning and daring to transfigure with subtlety the sacred Word of God. This was undoubtedly a trick of Satan to impair the authority of Scripture and remove any true advantage out of the reading of it... Scripture, they say, is fertile and thus bears multiple meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is the most rich and inexhaustible fount of all wisdom. But I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which anyone may fasten to it at his pleasure. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one (*verum sensum scripturae, qui germanus est et simplex*) and let us embrace and hold it resolutely. Let us not merely neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions which lead us away from the literal sense (*a literali sensu*).⁷⁶

two schools: the Alexandrian and the Antiochene. The former tended towards allegorical interpretation and its origin may be traced to Origen (c. 185-254 AD). In reaction, the latter tended towards literal interpretation and its origin may be traced to Diodore of Tarsus (d. 394 AD). Origen believed that Scripture has a threefold sense: the literal, the moral and the spiritual. According to him, it is the third for which all readers of Scripture must strive since it is the highest sense. For details, see Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*, 77-128; Milton S Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 637-660. Cf. Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and the Continental Reformation", 338.

⁷⁶ *Comm.* on Gal. 4:22, CC, 84-85.

It should be noted that by "literal" is not meant "literalistic", for Calvin recognises that Scripture comprises various literary genres. Thus, if an allegory is intended in a passage, then, it should be interpreted as an allegory.⁷⁷ Indeed, Calvin himself indulged in allegorical interpretation occasionally.⁷⁸ He recognises typology in Scripture and deals with it competently.⁷⁹ At other times, he eschewed a literalistic interpretation of a

⁷⁷ "But what shall we reply to Paul's assertion? He certainly does not mean that Moses deliberately wrote the story so that it might be turned into an allegory, but is pointing out in what way the story relates to the present case. That is, when we see there the image of the Church figuratively delineated. And an *anagoge* of this sort is not foreign to the genuine and literal meaning, when a comparison was drawn between the Church and the family of Abraham. For as the house of Abraham was then the true Church, so it is beyond doubt that the principal and most memorable events that happened in it are types for us. Therefore, as in circumcision, in sacrifices, in the whole Levitical priesthood there was an allegory, as there is today in our sacraments, so was there likewise in the house of Abraham. But this does not involve a departure from the literal meaning (*a literali sensu*). In a word, it is as if Paul says that there is depicted in the two wives of Abraham a figure of the two covenants, and in the two sons a figure of the two peoples." *Comm. on Gal. 4:22*, CC, 84-85.

⁷⁸ *Comm. on Lev 11:3*, CTS, 61-62: "Whilst I fear that but little confidence can be placed in the allegories, in which many have taken delight; so I do not find any fault with, nor even refuse that which has been handed down from the ancients, viz., that by the cleaving of the hoof is signified prudence in distinguishing the mysteries of Scripture, and by the chewing of the cud serious meditation on its heavenly doctrines; although I cannot approve of the subtlety which they add, viz., that those 'rightly divide the word' who have known how to elicit mystical senses from its letter; because hence it has come to pass that they have allowed themselves in all sorts of imaginations. I therefore embrace the more simple notion, that they who only have a taste for the carnal sense, do not divide the hoof; for, as Paul says, only 'he that is spiritual discerneth all things.' (1 Cor. ii.15). The chewing of the cud ought to follow, duly to prepare and digest the spiritual food; for many gulp down Scripture without profit, because they neither sincerely desire to profit by it, nor seek to refresh their souls by it, as their nourishment; but satisfied with the empty delights of knowledge, make no efforts to conform their life to it. In the first clause, then, brutal stupidity is condemned; in the other, the ambition and levity of curious men. God, indeed, set before Peter, in the vision, unclean animals as images and figures of the Gentiles, (Acts x. 12) and therefore it is lawful, by probable analogy, to transfer to men what is said about the animals."

⁷⁹ An example of this is his treatment of Matthew 2:23, where he rejects the solution provided by Chrysostom, Josephus and others on the origin of the title, "Nazarene", as given to Christ, and then concludes thus: "Bucer, in my opinion, has the best understanding of them all, who believes that the passage from Judges 13:5 is intended. The words there bear on Samson. But as Samson is called redeemer of the people insofar as he prefigured Christ, and as the salvation won by his hand and service were only a foreshadowing, a prelude, to that full salvation which would at length be shown to the world through God's Son, all that the Scripture tells to Samson's credit must be transferred to Christ by right. To put it more distinctly, Christ is the primary example, Samson is the subsidiary 'anti-type'. So when he put on the role of redeemer, we must know that all the praise that was showered on his noble, indeed divine, achievement

text simply because he recognises figurative language is involved.⁸⁰ What Calvin was opposed to, therefore, is not so much a proper or legitimate use of allegorical interpretation as an indiscriminate application of it.⁸¹ Where there is indulgence in “subtleties” or “subtle speculations”, “futile refinements”, a “perverse desire” to “know more than is good for” us and to be “ingenious”, “clever” or “cunning and daring”, there you will find the abuse of allegorical interpretation.

What, then, is “literal” interpretation? It is that method of interpretation which adheres “strictly to the natural treatment of things”, keeps “within the bounds of simplicity”, is “contented with simplicity”, respects the “grammatical and natural sense of Scripture”, and finds “the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one”.⁸² In a word, it is

was as truly his, as it was properly Christ's.” *Comm.* on Matt. 2:23, CC, 105.

⁸⁰ “It would indeed be foolish and puerile to insist here on a literal fulfilment: at the same time, I do not say, that the Prophet speaks allegorically; for I am disposed to keep from allegories, as there is in them nothing sound nor solid: but I must yet say that there is a figurative language used here, when it is said, that the Tyrians and Sidonians shall be sold and driven here and there into distant countries, and that this shall be done for the sake of God's chosen people and his Church, as though the Jews were to be sellers. When God says, ‘I will sell’, it is not meant that he is to descend from heaven for the purpose of selling, but that he will execute judgment on them; and then the second clause – that they shall be sold by the Jews, derives its meaning from the first; and this cannot be a common sale, as if the Jews were to receive a price and make a merchandise of them. But God declares that the Jews would be the sellers, because in this manner he signifies his vengeance for the wrong done to them.” *Comm.* on Joel 3:8, CTS, 126.

⁸¹ Commenting on Genesis 21:11-12, Calvin, while allowing for an allegorical interpretation, nevertheless cautions: “In the first place, [Paul] says, that what is here read, was written allegorically: not that he wishes all histories, indiscriminately, to be tortured to an allegorical sense, as Origen does; who, by hunting every where for allegories, corrupts the whole Scripture; and others, too eagerly emulating his example, have extracted smoke out of light. And not only has the simplicity of Scripture been vitiated, but the faith has been almost subverted, and the door opened to many foolish dotings. The design of Paul was, to raise the minds of the pious to consider the secret work of God, in this history; as if he had said, What Moses relates concerning the house of Abraham, belongs to the spiritual kingdom of Christ; since, certainly, that house was a lively image of the Church. This, however, is the allegorical similitude which Paul commends.” *Comm.* on Gen 21:11-12, CTS, 545-546. Cf. *Inst.* 2.5.19 (339): “Allegories ought not to go beyond the limits set by the rule of Scripture.”

⁸² Involved in “literal” interpretation is also what Calvin so notably called the principle of the *analogy of faith* (*analogia fidei*), in contrast to the *rule of faith* (*regula fidei*) propounded by Rome. In his “Prefatory Address to King Francis” in the 1559 *Institutes*, 12-13, Calvin wrote: “When Paul wished all prophecy to be made to accord with the

that method which takes the simplicity and, by implication, the perspicuity of Scripture most seriously.⁸³ That Calvin himself took these seriously is evident from the stated aim and method of his own exposition of Scripture. In the dedication to his first commentary, on the Epistle to the Romans (1539), Calvin noted that of those who had attempted a similar undertaking in his day, Bucer is most commendable because "no one in our time has been more precise or diligent in interpreting Scripture than he".⁸⁴ However, Bucer is too verbose for those who had limited time, and "too profound to be easily understood by less intelligent and attentive readers."⁸⁵ Calvin thus took it upon himself not only to be "brief"⁸⁶ but to ensure that "humbler minds" are assisted by his commentary.⁸⁷ Twenty

analogy of faith [Rom 12:6], he set forth a very clear rule to test all interpretation of Scripture. Now, if our interpretation be measured by this rule of faith, victory is in our hands." For specific applications of this principle, see *Inst.* 2.11.3; 3.13.4; 4.14.5; 4.14.13; 4.17.3; 4.17.10; 4.17.16; 4.17.21. See, also, *Comm.* on Rom 12:6, CC, 268-269. The modern equivalent, in hermeneutical terms, would be *the analogy of Scripture* (*analogia scripturae*) which has been defined by Osborne as "the principle of Scripture determining Scripture". See Grant R Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 273. Also, *ibid*, 11, 273-274, 355. For other helpful discussions, see Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (London: Evangelical Press, 1973), 163-166; Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 579-581.

⁸³ Commenting on Jesus' words in Matthew 16:19 and John 20:22-23, Calvin insists upon "an interpretation not subtle, not forced, not distorted; but natural, fluent, and plain." See *Inst.* 4.11.1 (1212).

⁸⁴ "John Calvin to Simon Grynaeus", *Comm.* on Romans, CC, 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 3. Of Melanchthon, Calvin says that he "deliberately passes over many matters which can cause great trouble to those of average understanding". *Ibid*, 2. Note Calvin's concern throughout for readers of "average understanding" and who are "less intelligent".

⁸⁶ "Both of us felt that lucid brevity constituted the particular virtue of an interpreter. ...in particular I have decided to treat every point with such brevity that my readers would not lose much time in the present work..." *Ibid*, 2-3.

⁸⁷ "I was, however, in doubt for some time whether it would be advantageous to follow these and other scholars in gleaning certain passages in which I thought I might be able to assist humbler minds, or whether I should compose a continuous commentary in which I should have to repeat much that had previously been said by all these commentators, or at least by some of them. These writers, however, frequently vary from one another, and this fact creates much difficulty for simple-minded readers, who are hesitant as to which opinion they ought to accept. I thought, therefore, that I should not regret having undertaken this task if, by pointing to the best interpretation, I relieved them of the trouble of forming a judgment." *Ibid*, 3.

years later, in one of his last commentaries, on the Minor Prophets (1559), Calvin maintains the same aim and method.⁸⁸

It must be said that it is not a method which Calvin himself devised. He finds the precedent in Scripture itself. He cites Moses as one of his models.⁸⁹ It must not be held against Moses if he has not written upon the creation of the sun and moon with 'astronomical exactness'.⁹⁰ His task as a theologian is to address "himself to our sense" and "to declare what we all may plainly perceive".⁹¹ And "because he was ordained a teacher as well of the unlearned" and "the uneducated" he "adapts his discourse to common usage."⁹² The prophets too were his models of the simple and sincere approach in hermeneutics.⁹³ So is the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews a

⁸⁸ "If God has endued me with any aptness for the interpretation of Scripture, I am fully persuaded that I have faithfully and carefully endeavoured to exclude from it all barren refinements, however plausible and fitted to please the ear, and to preserve *genuine simplicity*, adapted solidly to edify the children of God, who, being not content with the shell, wish to penetrate to the kernel." "Calvin's Epistle to King Gustavus", *Comm. on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, CTS, xviii-xix. Cf., *John Calvin: Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, 136: "For I love instead to hold fast to the simplicity of the Scriptures in order to teach what is expedient to know rather than to digress about in order to be perceived as subtle." *Ibid*, 156: "Furthermore, I have sought, insofar as possible, to accommodate myself to the rudeness of the simple, for whom I primarily labour. Thus the Anabaptists cannot cavil, as is their custom, that I have sought to win over the simple through subtlety or conquer them by means of human eloquence, since I have used as popular and simple a means as I knew how."

⁸⁹ *Comm. on Gen 1:14*, CTS, 84-85: "It must be remembered, that Moses does not speak with philosophical acuteness on occult mysteries, but relates those things which are everywhere observed, even by the uncultivated, and which are in common use... since it is manifest that Moses does not depart from the ordinary custom of men, I desist from a longer discussion".

⁹⁰ *Comm. on Gen 1:15*, CTS, 85: "It is well again to repeat what I have said before, that it is not here philosophically discussed, how great the sun is in the heaven, and how great, or how little, is the moon; but how much light comes from them." *Comm. on Gen 1:16*, CTS, 86: "I have said, that Moses does not here subtly descant, as a philosopher, on the secrets of nature, as may be seen in these words."

⁹¹ *Comm. on Gen 1:15*, CTS, 85.

⁹² *Comm. on Gen 1:16*, CTS, 86-87. Cf. *ibid*, 86: "Here lies the difference; Moses wrote in a popular style things which, without instruction, all ordinary persons, endued with common sense, are able to understand; but astronomers investigate with great labour whatever the sagacity of the human mind can comprehend."

⁹³ *Comm. on Luke 24:27*, CC, 236: "Bucer puts out a wise conjecture somewhere, that in this obscure material the Jews were used to a certain method of interpreting Scripture

model of restraint in the interpretation of types and shadows in the Old Testament.⁹⁴ Christ, however, is the model *par excellence* in interpreting Scripture.⁹⁵ For no one was ever “a more gifted or suitable Teacher of the Gospel than the Lord Himself”.⁹⁶ He is the “faithful Interpreter, teaching us the nature of the Law, its object, and its scope”.⁹⁷ His own aversion to allegorical interpretation Calvin traces to Christ’s aversion to the same. Of the three Jewish religious groups in New Testament times, Calvin observed, it was the Pharisees who Christ condemned as the “worst corrupters of Scripture”.⁹⁸ Indeed, Calvin believes that they were not called Pharisees because of their vow of separation. Rather, they were so called because

which the Fathers had handed down to them. Without going on to uncertain ground I am satisfied with the simple and sincere approach we frequently find throughout the prophets, who were extremely apt interpreters of the Law.”

⁹⁴ *Comm.* on Exod 21:1, CTS, 172-173: “Of this sobriety, too, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a fit master for us, who, although he professedly shews the analogy between the shadows of the Law and the truth manifested in Christ, yet only sparingly touches upon some main points, and by this moderation restrains us from too curious disquisitions and deep speculations.”

⁹⁵ Calvin cites an example of how Christ used Scripture in the face of opposition in his *Comm.* on Luke 20:37, CC, 31: “After refuting their absurd case Christ affirms the doctrine of the final resurrection by the testimony of Scripture. This is the order we must always follow with enemies of truth – repulse their lies, then let them know that they are opposed to the Word of God. Until they are convinced by the testimony of Scripture, they will always be free to grumble on. Christ quotes a passage from Moses because He was dealing with Sadducees who had little faith in the prophets, or at least held them in the same regard as we do the book Ecclesiasticus or the history of the Maccabees. Also they had cited Moses and he preferred to go back to the same authority rather than bring up any single prophet. He did not aim anyway at a complete collection of scriptural passages; any more than we see the Apostles using the same testimonies for the same subject.”

⁹⁶ *Comm.* on Luke 24:27, CC, 235.

⁹⁷ *Comm.* on Matt 5:21, CC, 184.

⁹⁸ *Comm.* on Acts 26:4-5, CC, 270: “As far as the Sadducees were concerned, although they boasted that they were literalists (*literales*), they had surely put out the light of Scripture, and had lapsed into disgraceful and crass ignorance. The Essenes, content with a life of austerity, did not trouble themselves very much about the study of doctrine. And it is no objection that Christ inveighs against the Pharisees in particular, as the worst of all corrupters of Scripture (Matt. 23:13). For their claiming for themselves the right to interpret Scripture according to a secret and hidden sense (*ex arcano et recondito sensu*), was the source of that presumption to change and innovate, which made the Lord burn with anger.”

they were not satisfied with the plain text.⁹⁹ It is not at all surprising, therefore, that "Christ gives authority not only to reject in good conscience but actually by obligation anything that the Scribes mix in of their own to the pure teaching of the Law... Clearly Christ encourages the people to obey the Scribes just so far as they adhere to the pure and simple interpretation of the Law."¹⁰⁰ If Christ himself should insist upon "the pure and simple interpretation" of Scripture, who is Calvin to suggest otherwise?

It is now apparent why Calvin insists upon the literal and, therefore, simple interpretation of Scripture as opposed to allegorical interpretation. Apart from the fact that allegorical interpretation is not the Scriptural method (as the precedence of the Scriptural authors and Christ himself have demonstrated), it is also "harmful" for "this error has been the source of many evils", "a great number of perverse opinions", and "deadly corruptions".¹⁰¹ Among these repugnant errors, to name but a few, are those related to free will, predestination, the cause of salvation,¹⁰² the merits of works and, last but not least, divine providence itself.¹⁰³ As

⁹⁹ *Comm.* on Matt 5:20, CC, 182-183: "But it is a mistake to think they were so named from separation... for they were called ... *Perushim*, meaning, interpreters, for they were not satisfied with the plain text, but claimed to have a key to elicit hidden senses. This was the origin of that vast agglomeration they produced, when they pulled the teaching authority into their own court, and with godless licence and equal arrogance dared to obtrude their own figments into the place of Scripture." *Comm.* on Acts 7:44, CC, 206: "We see therefore that it is because of their presumption that the Jews are first of all censured, because they were not content with the simple Word of God and were dragged along in the wake of their own inventions."

¹⁰⁰ *Comm.* on Matt. 23:2, CC, 47-48.

¹⁰¹ These exact words of Calvin are derived from the citations found on page 146 of this chapter. Parker has similarly observed that Calvin's overriding preference for literal interpretation is due to the fact that the allegorical approach of the Romanists and the fanatics clouded the plain meaning of many texts which gave rise to all sorts of heresies. See Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 64.

¹⁰² See, *John Calvin: Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, 43.

¹⁰³ *Comm.* on Acts 20:26-27, CC, 180-181: "I said that prudence must be shown, because we must always have regard to what is beneficial, provided that there is no cunning, in which many take an excessive pride, when they alter the Word of God to suit their own methods, and devise for us some vague philosophy or other, which is a mixture of the Gospel and their own fancies, because, of course, this concoction is more

indicated earlier on, we shall have occasion to address the relationship between hermeneutics and the last of these errors in the final section of this chapter.

Calvin's emphasis on the perspicuity of Scripture is significant too from one other consideration. Rome, in support of concrete idolatry, had declared that images are the books of the "uneducated".¹⁰⁴ It would seem that this was justified by their assertion that Scripture in itself is not suited to the uneducated since it is obscure and ambiguous and a hidden mystery.¹⁰⁵ Upon the same pretext, they forbid anyone to interpret Scripture for himself.¹⁰⁶ Calvin's rebuttal may be summed up thus: not only does Scripture plainly refute their teaching that images are the books of the uneducated;¹⁰⁷ more importantly, Scripture, by the mere fact of its perspicuity, is meant for "all", including the simple.¹⁰⁸ Nowhere is this rebuttal more clearly stated than

pleasing. From that we have free-will, from that the merits of works, from that the denial of God's providence and God's gracious election."

¹⁰⁴ *Inst.* 1.11.5 (105).

¹⁰⁵ *Comm.* on Acts 18:28, CC, 146-147: "Accordingly the Papists' charge that Scripture is obscure and ambiguous is a detestable insult to God. For why would God have spoken, except that the clear and invincible truth might reveal itself in His words? And their cavil, which is an inference from that, that we must adhere to the authority of the Church, and that we must not use scripture to dispute with heretics, is abundantly refuted by Luke." *Sermon* on Deut 30:11-14 (1060): "And here a man may see the froward unthankfulness of the papists, which would make men believe that they should not venture to read the holy Scripture... because it is so high and so deep a thing, that men shall be forthwith carried away into many errors and fancies."

¹⁰⁶ Commenting on 2 Peter 1:20, Calvin notes how the Papists twist this text to mean that "no interpretation of private individuals ought to be looked on as authentic" and that only their councils have "the final authority to interpret Scripture". Calvin objects: "Peter speaks of *private interpretation* not to prohibit any individual from handling Scripture by himself, but he is saying that whatever men bring to it of their own is profane. Let the whole world be unanimously agreed, and let all the minds of men be of one united opinion, what results would still be private and their own, because the subject is contrasted here with divine revelation, in that the faithful are enlightened by the Holy Spirit and acknowledge only what God wills in his Word." *Comm.* on 2 Pet 1:20, CC, 343-344.

¹⁰⁷ *Inst.* 1.11.6 (106): "Therefore, if the papists have any shame, let them henceforward not use this evasion, that pictures are the books of the uneducated, because it is plainly refuted by very many testimonies of Scripture."

¹⁰⁸ *Comm.* on Psa 119:130, CTS, 11: "By *little ones* he denotes such as neither excel in ingenuity nor are endowed with wisdom, but rather are unskilled in letters, and unrefined by education. Of such he affirms that, as soon as they have learned the first

in his commentary on 2 Peter 1:19 where he writes:

It is worth noticing further what he says about the clarity of Scripture. This would be a false commendation if Scripture were not a fit and proper guide to show us clearly the way. Therefore anyone who opens his eyes by the obedience of faith will see by that very experiment that Scripture has not been called a lamp for nothing. To the unbelieving it is obscure, but those who wilfully give themselves over to death are blind anyway. It is therefore a damnable blasphemy of the Papists to imagine that the light of Scripture does nothing but dazzle the eyes, so that they frighten off the simple from reading it.¹⁰⁹

Commenting on Acts 17:11, Calvin says that the perspicuity of Scripture implies that the task of interpretation should not be arrogated to the Church, as Rome would insist. Rather, no doctrine is worth believing except it has been revealed in Scripture. Then, citing the Bereans as an example of those who examined Paul's teaching according to the rule of Scripture, Calvin mockingly asks if the Pope should be regarded as superior to Paul. If not, then his teaching ought to be examined as well.¹¹⁰ He then concludes with the following remark:

And let us note that this is not said about some masquerading...

principles of the law of God, they will be endued with understanding... Let the Papists mock, as they are accustomed to do because we would have the Scriptures to be read by all men without exception... God will not, therefore, disappoint the desire of such as acknowledge their own ignorance, and submit themselves humbly to his teaching." Cf. *Inst.* 1.11.7 (107): "In the preaching of his Word and sacred mysteries he has bidden that a common doctrine be there set forth for all." *Sermon* on Job 38:1-4 (689): "And let us no more make this fond excuse, that God's word is so high and dark for us... For when we shall have well cast up our account we shall find for a certainty that our Lord setteth us forth such a majesty in his word, as is able to make all creatures quake; and yet is there also simplicity, to the end to make it to be received of the most ignorant and unskilful..."

¹⁰⁹ *Comm.* on 2 Pet. 1:19, CC, 342.

¹¹⁰ *Comm.* on Acts 17:11, CC, 101.

Council, but of a small company of men, which makes it all the clearer that individuals are called to read Scripture.¹¹¹

In contrast to the Papists who felt they were above board, and because he himself held tenaciously to the perspicuity of Scripture, Calvin was more than willing to subject his own teaching to the scrutiny of Christians with their open Bible.¹¹² In these different ways, therefore, Calvin affirms his commitment to the perspicuity of Scripture.¹¹³ In doing so, he also demonstrates in a very profound sense that the subject of the authority of Scripture cannot be divorced from its perspicuity nor the interpretation of its contents. Thus, for instance, if Rome claimed that the Church alone has authority over Scripture, she does so on the pretext that Scripture itself is too obscure for any individual to understand or interpret it. To prove their point they indulge in allegorical interpretation with the result that they twist Scripture to yield so many meanings - not to mention, so many errors - that the individual cannot but feel that Scripture is indeed

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 101.

¹¹² *John Calvin: Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful Against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists*, 57: "Now because it is insufficient simply to assert that, let us see if a good approbation for our doctrine doesn't exist in Scripture. For I willingly submit to this condition: that no one ought to believe anything I might say unless it is founded on Scripture." Cf. *Ibid*, 156: "Now to conclude, I beg all Christian readers to examine the whole matter in Scripture, as it is the true touchstone for testing every doctrine. I am confident that whoever will let himself be led by God's truth and will willingly submit to reason will find ample satisfaction with my repudiation of the articles here."

¹¹³ It is worth mentioning that though Calvin believes that the eschatological vision of God is a much clearer one than even Scripture can offer, that does not take away the objective reality of the perspicuity of Scripture with respect to our knowledge of God. Commenting on 1 Cor 13:13, he writes: "Therefore we must understand it in this way: that the knowledge of God, which we now derive from His Word, is undoubtedly reliable and true, and there is nothing muddled, or unintelligible or dark about it; but when it is called 'obscure'... it is in a relative way, because it falls a long way short of that clear revelation to which we look forward, when we shall see face to face. So this verse is not in conflict in any way with others, which speak of the clarity, sometimes of the law, sometimes of the whole of Scripture, and most of all of the Gospel. For there is an open and naked revelation of God in the Word (enough to meet our needs), and there is nothing recondite... about it, as unbelievers imagine, to keep us in a state of uncertainty. But how small a share this is of the vision toward which we reach out! Therefore it is described as 'obscure' only in comparison with the other." *Comm.* on 1 Cor. 13:13, CC, 282.

too obscure without the aid of the interpretation of the Church. Given this scenario, Calvin's insistence upon the perspicuity of Scripture, his commitment to the literal interpretation of Scripture, his holding together the dual tasks of exegete and theologian, and his stated desire to expound Scripture simply and plainly so that common folks can understand it, are not only inevitable but perfectly understandable.

The implications of Scripture's perspicuity, however, do not end solely with the subject of hermeneutics. It also directs our attention to the vital connection Calvin sees between hermeneutics and the reader's personal faith and piety.

III. FAITH, PIETY AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THE CREATOR

That Scripture is in itself perspicuous is no guarantee that anyone who reads it will come to a true understanding of what it teaches. The Psalmist, Calvin observes, acknowledges that though "God gives light to us by his word... we are blind amid the clearest light."¹¹⁴ There is a twofold reason for this. The first, as we have already noticed, is closely related to the principle of divine accommodation. Finite man, despite God's accommodation in Scripture, is incapable of understanding the supernatural truths revealed in it.¹¹⁵ The problem, however, is compounded by the perversity of man's mind as a result of the fall of Adam into sin.¹¹⁶ Calvin treats this latter aspect at length in *Inst.* 2.2. He notes that the natural gifts were corrupted in man through sin, but that his supernatural gifts, which included "the light of faith as well as righteousness...sufficient to attain heavenly life and eternal bliss", were

¹¹⁴ *Comm.* on Psa 119:17, CTS, 413.

¹¹⁵ See especially pages 139-140 of this chapter.

¹¹⁶ The failure of "philosophical" anthropology, Calvin maintains, is due to its ignorance of the doctrine of sin: "We are forced to part somewhat from this way of teaching because the philosophers, ignorant of the corruption of nature that originated from the penalty of man's defection, mistakenly confuse two very diverse states of man." *Inst.* 1.15.7 (194).

stripped from him.¹¹⁷ Calvin draws a similar distinction but in a different manner when he observed that “there is one kind of understanding of earthly things; another of heavenly”.¹¹⁸ Of the former, Calvin says that despite man’s perverted and degenerate nature some sparks still gleam.¹¹⁹ There remains in fallen man some traces of the image of God which distinguish the human race from all other creatures.¹²⁰ Of the latter, however, Calvin writes:

We must now analyze what human reason can discern with regard to God’s Kingdom and to spiritual insight. This spiritual insight consists chiefly in three things: (1) knowing God; (2) knowing his fatherly favor in our behalf, in which our salvation consists; (3) knowing how to frame our life according to the rule of his law. In the first two points – and especially in the second – the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles!¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Inst.* 2.2.12 (270). Calvin also adds: “Among these are faith, love of God, charity toward neighbour, zeal for holiness and for righteousness. All these, since Christ restores them in us, are considered adventitious, and beyond nature: and for this reason we infer that they were taken away.” Cf. *Inst.* 2.2.4 (260): “Meanwhile the well-known statement flitted from mouth to mouth: that the natural gifts in man were corrupted, but the supernatural taken away. But scarcely one man in a hundred had an inkling of its significance. For my part, if I wanted clearly to teach what the corruption of nature is like, I would readily be content with these words.”

¹¹⁸ *Inst.* 2.2.13 (272): “I call ‘earthly things’ those which do not pertain to God or his kingdom... I call ‘heavenly things’ the pure knowledge of God... The first class includes government, household management, all mechanical skills, and the liberal arts. In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will by which we conform our lives to it.”

¹¹⁹ *Inst.* 2.2.12 (270). Calvin dwells at length on some of these in *Inst.* 2.2.12-16 (270-275), viz., man’s reason, his desire to preserve society, and his knowledge of the arts and sciences. Cf. Comm. on 1 Cor 3:19, CC, 81: “We have already explained what Paul means by the wisdom of this world: for natural insight is a gift of God. The arts men naturally pursue, and all the disciplines by which wisdom is acquired are also gifts of God. But they have their definite limits, for they do not penetrate into the heavenly Kingdom of God. Accordingly they ought to be maid-servants, not mistresses. Besides that, they must be looked upon as useless and worthless until they are subordinated completely to the Word and Spirit of God. But if they set themselves up against Christ they must be considered injurious pests.”

¹²⁰ *Inst.* 2.2.17 (277).

¹²¹ *Inst.* 2.2.18 (277).

He further adds that human reason “neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes a straight aim at, this truth: to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be toward us”.¹²² In that respect, Calvin could say without contradiction that “human knowledge wholly fails as regards the first table of the law”,¹²³ and this despite the fact that man has the perspicuous Scripture at hand.¹²⁴

The key to resolving this tension between the objective perspicuity of Scripture and its subjective perspicuity to the reader, Calvin observes, is the work of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁵ Noting that “man’s keenness of mind is mere blindness as far as the knowledge of God is concerned”, Calvin offers the following solution: “Flesh is not capable of such lofty wisdom as to conceive God and what is God’s, unless it be illumined by the Spirit of God.”¹²⁶ Commenting on 1 Cor 1:13ff, he says that the natural man comprehends nothing of God’s mysteries. Why is this? Is it because of laziness? No, says Calvin. Even though he try, he can do nothing, for they are “spiritually discerned”. Calvin goes on to add:

What does this mean? Because these mysteries are deeply hidden from human insight, they are disclosed solely by the revelation of

¹²² *Inst.* 2.2.18 (278).

¹²³ *Inst.* 2.2.24 (283).

¹²⁴ *Inst.* 3.2.34 (582): “Indeed, the Word of God is like the sun, shining upon all those to whom it is proclaimed, but with no effect among the blind. Now, all of us are blind by nature in this respect.” In point of fact, Calvin goes so far as to suggest that this incapacity of man to know God is best evidenced by man’s incapacity even to know God through the open exhibition of the incarnate Christ who is God’s image. See *Inst.* 2.2.20 (279).

¹²⁵ Calvin has observed that there are three ways in which God acts the part of our teacher, *Comm.* on Psa 143:1, CTS, 256-257: “...instructing us by his word, enlightening our minds by the Spirit, and engraving instruction upon our hearts, so as to bring us to observe it with a true and cordial consent. The mere hearing of the word would serve no purpose, nor is it enough that we understand it; there must be besides the willing obedience of the heart.”

¹²⁶ *Inst.* 2.2.19 (278). Cf. *The Secret Providence of God*, 345: “By these words John signifieth that whatsoever of human reason or understanding was given to men at the beginning, was all stifled and extinguished by sin, and that no remedy now remains than the enlightening of the blind eyes by the Spirit of Christ”.

the Spirit. Hence, where the Spirit of God does not illumine them, they are considered folly.¹²⁷

Thus, the objective perspicuity of Scripture in itself is not sufficient. In order for the reader to understand what has been so perspicuously revealed in Scripture, the illumination of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary.¹²⁸

The indispensability of the Spirit's illumination stands behind Calvin's thinking on a number of closely related issues of which two are particularly significant to our discussion here. First of all, it provides a clue to the radical qualitative distinction he makes throughout Book 1 between mere natural and rational knowledge of Scripture and that which may be known by the Spirit's revelation and through faith alone. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that unless we have been illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith we cannot understand that the worlds have been fashioned by God's word.¹²⁹ It was by his Word that God rendered faith unambiguous for the patriarchs, "a faith that should be

¹²⁷ *Inst.* 2.2.20 (280). Cf. *Comm.* on Ezek 2:1-2, 108-109: "This work of the Spirit, then, is joined with the word of God. But the distinction is made, that we may know that the external word is of no avail by itself, unless animated by the power of Spirit. If any one should object, that the word was useless, because not efficacious by itself, the solution is at hand, that if God takes this method of acting there is no reason why we should object to it. But we have a still clearer reply: since God always works in the hearts of men by the Spirit, yet his word is not without fruit; because, as God enlightens us by the sun, and yet he alone is the Father of Lights, and the splendour of the sun is profitless except as God uses it as an instrument, so we must conclude concerning his word, because the Holy Spirit penetrates our hearts, and thus enlightens our minds."

¹²⁸ *Comm.* on Psa 119:12, *CTS*, 409-410: "This passage informs us generally, that if God do not enlighten us with the spirit of discernment, we are not competent to behold the light which shines forth from his law, though it be constantly before us. And thus it happens, that not a few are blind even when surrounded with the clear revelation of this doctrine, because, confident in their own perspicacity, they contemn the internal illumination of the Holy Spirit." *Comm.* on Luke 24:46, *CC*, 246: "In this context we have the refutation of the false idea, that outward teaching would be superfluous unless our understanding were supplemented naturally by some faculty we possess. What point, they say, would there be in the Lord's talking to deaf ears? We see, however, that when the Spirit of Christ fulfils His role of the Teacher within, then the effort of the minister who speaks aloud is a real thing. Christ gives a truly fruitful discourse on Scripture once He has gifted them with the understanding of the Spirit."

¹²⁹ *Inst.* 1.5.14 (68).

superior to all opinion".¹³⁰ If we are not to be perpetually beset by instability of doubt or vacillation, we "ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit".¹³¹ Not that Calvin viewed such knowledge as irrational. Rather, through the Spirit's illumination the human mind is exalted to a level beyond that which it is normally capable of in its finite and sinful nature.¹³² As he elsewhere so succinctly put it:

When we call faith "knowledge" we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man's mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained, it cannot comprehend what it feels. But while it is persuaded of what it does not grasp, by the very certainty of its persuasion it understands more than if it perceived anything human by its own capacity. ...what our mind embraces by faith is in every way infinite, and that this kind of knowledge is far more lofty than all understanding.¹³³

The kind of knowledge acquired through faith is thus supra-rational with the result that both hermeneutics and theology are not to be viewed as either purely rational or irrational but rather supra-rational.

It should be added that faith in this context is not, therefore, distinct

¹³⁰ *Inst.* 1.6.2 (71).

¹³¹ *Inst.* 1.7.4 (78).

¹³² *Inst.* 3.2.34 (582): "For the soul, illumined by him, takes on a new keenness, as it were, to contemplate the heavenly mysteries, whose splendour had previously blinded it. And man's understanding, thus beamed by the light of the Holy Spirit, then, at last truly begins to taste those things which belong to the Kingdom of God, having formerly been quite foolish and dull in tasting them... Accordingly, it cannot penetrate into our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through his illumination makes entry for it."

¹³³ *Inst.* 3.2.14 (559-560). Cf. *Inst.* 3.2.33 (580-581): "Accordingly, without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the Word can do nothing. From this, also, it is clear that faith is much higher than human understanding."

from saving faith. Calvin hints at this when he describes faith in the following manner:

Such, then, is a conviction that requires no reasons; such, a knowledge with which the best reason agrees – in which the mind truly reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons; such, finally, a feeling that can be born only of heavenly revelation. I speak of nothing other than what each *believer* experiences within himself – though my words fall far beneath a just explanation of the matter.¹³⁴

In fact, Calvin almost always discusses the illuminating work of the Spirit within the context of saving faith. This is made very clear in *Inst.* 2.2.18-21. Those who are illumined by the Spirit, he equates with “believers who embrace Christ”¹³⁵ and “his elect through the Spirit of regeneration”.¹³⁶ The way to the kingdom of God, he says, “is open only to him whose mind has been made new by the illumination of the Spirit”.¹³⁷ The sort of instruction the Spirit offers, therefore, is not that “which the impious and profane also share” in.¹³⁸ Rather, it is meant for those “who will be gathered unto salvation” and who “shall be God’s disciples”.¹³⁹ What is

¹³⁴ *Inst.* 1.7.5 (80-81). [Italics for emphasis, mine.]

¹³⁵ *Inst.* 2.2.19 (278).

¹³⁶ *Inst.* 2.2.20 (278).

¹³⁷ *Inst.* 2.2.20 (279).

¹³⁸ *Inst.* 2.2.20 (279). Cf. *Comm.* on Heb. 4:11-13, CC, 50: “It is agreed that the Word of God is not equally efficacious in everyone. It applies its power to the elect to humble them by a true recognition of what they are so that they flee to the grace of Christ. This can never happen unless the Word penetrates to the depths of the heart... This sort of thing does not apply in the case of unbelievers. Either they carelessly disregard God when he speaks, and thus mock Him, or they clamour against His teaching and rise up rebelliously against it. Just as the Word of God is like a hammer, so their heart is like the anvil whose hardness withstands all blows, however forceful. They are a far cry from having the Word of God penetrate them even to the dividing of soul and spirit. Thus it seems that this sentence is to be restricted to those who believe only, since they alone are searched to the quick.”

¹³⁹ *Inst.* 2.2.20 (279). Cf. *Comm.* on Isa 30:24, CTS, 340: “In making preparation for the

particularly significant for our purpose is that this emphasis of Calvin was already anticipated in his discussion of the doctrine of Scripture in Book 1.¹⁴⁰ The following citations reveal how frequently Calvin already referred to this:

It was not in vain, then, that he added the light of his Word by which to become known unto salvation; and he regarded as worthy of this privilege those whom he pleased to gather more closely and intimately to himself... He has from the beginning maintained this plan for his church, so that besides these common proofs he also put forth his Word, which is a more direct and certain mark whereby he is to be recognised. There is no doubt that Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the rest of the patriarchs with this assistance penetrated to the intimate knowledge of him that in a way distinguished them from unbelievers.¹⁴¹

It is therefore clear that God has provided the assistance of the Word for the sake of all those to whom he has been pleased to give useful instruction because he foresaw that his likeness imprinted upon the most beautiful form of the universe would be insufficiently effective.¹⁴²

For although he also includes other uses of the law, he means in general that, since God in vain calls all peoples to himself by the

restoration of the Church, the Lord therefore enlightens by his word, and illuminates by the light of understanding, his own people, who formerly wandered astray in darkness. He does this by the secret influence of the Spirit; for it would be of little value to be taught by the external word, if he did not also instruct our hearts inwardly.”

¹⁴⁰ It should be added that Calvin emphasises the same in *Inst.* 3.1.4 (541-542); 3.2.12 (556-558); 3.2.15 (560-51). This serves to confirm the importance of this emphasis to Calvin and how for him, Christian theology is impossible without the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the obedience of faith on the part of man.

¹⁴¹ *Inst.* 1.6.1 (69-70).

¹⁴² *Inst.* 1.6.3 (72).

contemplation of heaven and earth, this is the very school of God's children.¹⁴³

Let us, then, know that the only true faith is that which the Spirit of God seals in our hearts. Indeed, the modest and teachable reader will be content with this one reason: Isaiah promised all the children of the renewed church that "they would be God's disciples" [Isa 54:13p]. God deems worthy of singular privilege only his elect, whom he distinguishes from the human race as a whole.¹⁴⁴

So while Calvin's full discussion of faith is deferred to *Inst.* 3.2, this emphasis of Calvin on the soteriological context of the knowledge of God as revealed in Scripture in Book 1 should not be overlooked. Calvin may not have discussed saving faith in Book 1 as fully as he did in Book 3. But that is no reason to suppose that it is not very much on his mind in Book 1; nor should it be supposed that his discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator and all the other related issues in Book 1 is divorced from the soteriological context mentioned above.

Secondly, the illumination of the Spirit also points to the close connection between hermeneutics and personal piety in Calvin's theology. The best hint of just such a relationship is found in his treatment of angels. He writes:

Nevertheless, we will take care to keep to the measure which the rule of godliness prescribes, that our readers may not, by speculating more deeply than is expedient, wander away from the simplicity of faith. And in fact, while the Spirit ever teaches us to our profit, he either remains absolutely silent upon those things of little value for edification, or only lightly and cursorily touches upon them. It is also our duty willingly to renounce those things which are

¹⁴³ *Inst.* 1.6.4 (73).

¹⁴⁴ *Inst.* 1.7.5 (81).

unprofitable.¹⁴⁵

For Calvin, therefore, the rule of “godliness” or “piety” circumscribes not merely how one should conceive of God and the sort of worship man owes him;¹⁴⁶ it also circumscribes what is permissible and what is not permissible in one’s approach to interpreting Scripture. In the context of hermeneutics, the first limit of piety is to avoid speculation.¹⁴⁷ In emphasising this, Calvin undoubtedly had in mind those who were guilty of allegorical interpretation since, as the above discussion has shown, it was precisely their approach to hermeneutics which has led to endless speculations. The reasons for such an avoidance is based solidly upon Calvin’s concern for the perspicuity (“the Spirit ever teaches us to our profit”) and the simplicity of Scripture (“simplicity of faith”) on the one hand, and his recognition of the limits prescribed by the principle of divine accommodation (“he either remains absolutely silent upon those things of little value for edification, or only lightly and cursorily touches upon them”).

¹⁴⁵ *Inst.* 1.14.3 (163).

¹⁴⁶ See page 172ff. of this Chapter. Cf. *Inst.* 1.2.1 (39), where Calvin insists, “Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety.” Also, *Inst.* 1.2.3 (42–43): “For, to begin with, the pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God. And it does not attach to him whatever it pleases, but is content to hold him to be as he manifests himself; furthermore, the mind always exercises the utmost diligence and care not to wander astray, or rashly and boldly to go beyond his will.”

¹⁴⁷ *Comm.* on 1 Tim.1:3, CC, 189: “It is worth noting that by new doctrine is meant not only teaching that is in open conflict with the pure doctrine of the Gospel, but anything that either corrupts the pure Gospel by new and adventitious inventions or obscures it by unholy speculations. All the imaginings of men are so many corruptions of the Gospel, and those who put the Scriptures to frivolous uses in an ungodly way, so as to make Christianity a clever display, darken the Gospel. All teaching of that kind is opposed to God’s Word and to that purity of doctrine in which Paul enjoins the Ephesians to remain.” Significantly, Calvin sums up his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity with the same warning: “Now, the godly reader will, I hope, recognise that these words refute all the chicaneries by which Satan has heretofore tried to pervert and darken the pure doctrine of faith. Finally, I trust that the whole sum of this doctrine has been faithfully explained, if my readers will impose a limit upon their curiosity, and not seek out for themselves more eagerly than is proper troublesome and perplexed disputations. For I suspect that those who intemperately delight in speculation will not be at all satisfied.” *Inst.* 1.13.29 (159).

on the other.¹⁴⁸ Secondly, Calvin maintains that all hermeneutics must aim at “edification” and not what is “unprofitable”.¹⁴⁹ He imposed upon his own hermeneutics what he termed “the limits of edification”.¹⁵⁰ The rule by which all doctrines are to be tried is this:

...those which tend to edification may be approved but those that prove themselves material for fruitless controversies are to be rejected as unworthy of the Church of God. If this test had been applied over several centuries, then, although religion might have been corrupted by many errors, at least there would have been less of that devilish art of disputation which goes by the name of scholastic theology. For that theology is nothing but contentions and idle speculations with nothing of value in them.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Inst.* 1.14.16 (175): “Some persons grumble that Scripture does not in numerous passages set forth systematically and clearly that fall of the devils, its cause, manner, time, and character. But because this has nothing to do with us, it was better not to say anything, or at least to touch upon it lightly, because it did not befit the Holy Spirit to feed our curiosity with empty histories to no effect.”

¹⁴⁹ That Calvin viewed this as an invariable aim in his hermeneutical and theological tasks is evident in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. See, for instance, his stated aim in treating the doctrine of the Trinity as he did, *Inst.* 1.13.29 (159): “Certainly I have not shrewdly omitted anything that I might think to be against me: but while I am zealous for the edification of the church, I felt that I would be better advised not to touch upon many things that would profit but little, and would burden my readers with useless trouble.” Also, his stated aim in treating the devil and his angels, *Inst.* 1.14.16 (175): “And what concern is it to us to know anything more about devils or to know it for another purpose?... And we see that the Lord’s purpose was to teach nothing in his sacred oracles except what we should learn to our edification.” Similarly, in treating the creation of man, Calvin wrote thus in *Inst.* 1.15.6 (193): “But I leave it to the philosophers to discuss these faculties in their subtle way. For the upbuilding of godliness a simple definition will be enough for us.”

¹⁵⁰ *Comm.* on Exod 21:1, CTS, 172: “It will suffice to have given these general limits; I now descend to particulars, in which let not my readers expect of me any conceits which may gratify their cars, since nothing is better than to contain ourselves within the limits of edification; and it would be puerile to make a collection of the *minutiæ* wherewith some philosophize; since it was by no means the intention of God to include mysteries in every hook and loop; and even although no part were without a mystical meaning, which no one in his senses will admit, it is better to confess our ignorance than to indulge ourselves in frivolous conjectures.”

¹⁵¹ *Comm.* on 1 Tim. 1:4, CC, 190.

As Calvin once so aptly put it, "The theologian's task is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable."¹⁵²

Further elaborating the limits of piety within his hermeneutic, Calvin goes on to add in his treatment of angels the following:

Not to take too long, let us remember here, as in all religious doctrine, that we ought to hold to one rule of modesty and sobriety: not to speak or guess, or even seek to know, concerning obscure matters anything except what has been imparted to us by God's Word. Furthermore, in the reading of Scripture we ought ceaselessly to endeavour to seek out and meditate upon those things which make for edification. Let us not indulge in curiosity or in the investigation of unprofitable things. And because the Lord willed to instruct us, not in fruitless questions, but in sound godliness, in the fear of his name, in true trust, and in the duties of holiness, let us be satisfied with this knowledge. For this reason, if we would be duly wise, we must leave those empty speculations which idle men have taught apart from God's Word concerning the nature, orders, and number of angels. I know that many persons more greedily seize upon and take more delight in them than in such things as have been put to daily use. But, if we are not ashamed of being Christ's disciples, let us not be ashamed to follow that method which he has prescribed. Thus it will come to pass that, content with his teaching, we shall not abandon but abhor those utterly empty speculations from which he calls us back.¹⁵³

Like the earlier passage, Calvin's emphasis upon the avoidance of speculation and the aim of edification in one's hermeneutics is

¹⁵² *Inst.* 1.14.4 (164).

¹⁵³ *Inst.* 1.14.4 (164).

unmistakable.

As early as *Inst.* 1.2, Calvin has defined piety as “that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces” in relation to the knowledge of God.¹⁵⁴ Pure and real religion, he says, is “faith so joined with an earnest fear of God”, a fear which also “embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.”¹⁵⁵ This same reverence, fear and faith, Calvin observes, is necessary to the task of the exegete: “Whoever, therefore, desires instruction from the law, let him regard with reverence and esteem the doctrine which it contains.”¹⁵⁶ Isaiah speaks to those who “fear God”; for,

...wherever there is no religion and no fear of God, there can be also no entrance for doctrine. We see how audaciously doctrine is rejected by those who, in other respects, wish to be reckoned acute and sagacious; for, in consequence of being swelled with pride, they detest modesty and humility, and are exceedingly stupid in this wisdom of God. It is not without good reason, therefore, that he lays this foundation, namely, the fear of God, that his Word may be attentively and diligently heard. Hence also it is evident that true fear of God is nowhere to be found, unless where men listen to his Word; for hypocrites do proudly and haughtily boast of piety and the fear of God, but they manifest rebellious contempt, when they reject the doctrine of the Gospel and all godly exhortations. The clear proof of such persons is, that the mask which they desire to wear is torn off.¹⁵⁷

Calvin also equates the rule of piety with “the rule of modesty and

¹⁵⁴ *Inst.* 1.2.1 (41).

¹⁵⁵ *Inst.* 1.2.2 (43).

¹⁵⁶ *Comm.* on Psa 25:14, CTS, 430-431.

¹⁵⁷ *Comm.* on Isa 50:10, CTS, 61.

sobriety”¹⁵⁸ thus highlighting what is perhaps, for him, the principal qualification of the interpreter of Scripture.¹⁵⁹ In his comments on Acts 8, he notes particularly the modesty of the Ethiopian eunuch in his approach to Scripture.¹⁶⁰ This modesty is characterised by two elements: firstly, a true reverence for Scripture, as seen by the eunuch’s frank acknowledgement of his own ignorance with respect to understanding Scripture; and secondly, diligence in seeking out the meaning of Scripture, despite his own ignorance.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ *Inst.* 1.14.4 (164).

¹⁵⁹ *Comm.* on Acts 20:26,27, CC, 180-181: “Therefore to what method of teaching must pastors adhere? In the first place, let them not use their own judgment to determine what is suitable to present in public and what to omit, but let them hand over the decision on that matter to God alone. In this way the door into the Church of God will not stand open to human fabrications. In the second place a mortal man will not arrogate to himself the presumption to tear to pieces or mutilate Scripture, to pick this or that as he pleases, to obscure things, and suppress many things, but he will teach whatever is revealed in Scripture, although he will do so prudently and opportunely for the upbuilding of the people, yet simply and without pretence, as befits a faithful and frank interpreter of God. I said that prudence must be shown, because we must always have regard to what is beneficial, provided that there is no cunning, in which many take an excessive pride, when they alter the Word of God to suit their own methods, and devise for us some vague philosophy or other, which is a mixture of the Gospel and their own fancies, because, of course, this concoction is more pleasing. From that we have free-will, from that the merits of works, from that the denial of God’s providence and God’s gracious election. But what I have just said deserves attention, that the *counsel of God*, which Paul mentions here, is included in His Word, and must not be sought anywhere else. For many things are hidden from us in this life, the full manifestation of which is deferred until that day, in which, with new eyes, we shall see God as He is, face to face. Therefore, the men who make known the will of God are those who expound Scripture faithfully, and from it establish the people in faith, in the fear of the Lord, and in all godly practices. But, as I have just said that this sentence condemns those who, by their philosophical arguments, corrupt the purity of Scripture with their own leavening influences, in order not to teach anything out of step with the common understanding of men, and therefore offensive, so Paul thunders violently against those who, out of fear of the cross and persecutions, speak only enigmatically.” Note the similar emphasis Calvin places upon the avoidance of speculation and edification as the aim of hermeneutics.

¹⁶⁰ *Comm.* on Acts 8:28, CC, 246: “Why then does he say that he cannot understand the passage he is reading? The reason is that he modestly acknowledges his ignorance in the more obscure verses...” *Comm.* on Acts 8:31, CC, 246: “The eunuch is remarkably modest, for not only does he calmly allow himself to be questioned by Philip, a common man, but acknowledges his ignorance, freely and frankly.”

¹⁶¹ *Comm.* on Acts 8:31, CC, 246: “However, let us remember that the eunuch was so conscious of his ignorance that he was, for all that, one of God’s pupils by reading the Scripture. Finally, there is true reverence for Scripture when we acknowledge that there is hidden in it a wisdom which surpasses and escapes our powers of understanding; yet we do not feel aversion to it for that reason, but, reading diligently, we depend on the

With respect to the first element, Calvin is quick to point out that the reason why so many are “blind even when surrounded with the clear revelation of” God is because they are “confident in their own perspicacity”.¹⁶² It is through “the pride and haughtiness of their hearts” that they “despise Moses and the prophets”. Rather than “cultivate the graces of meekness and humility”, they rely upon their own wisdom or trust their own understanding and attempt, by their own efforts, “to comprehend those mysteries and secrets, the knowledge of which David here declares to be the prerogative of God alone.”¹⁶³ It is obvious now why Calvin rejects Castellio’s appeal to common sense and to reason in *The Secret Providence of God*. Apart from the fact that ultimately they are nothing more than the reasoning of the natural man,¹⁶⁴ Calvin traces their origin to Castellio’s pride. As Calvin so accurately pointed out to Castellio, what marks the difference between them was just this: Calvin emphasised the absolute necessity for meekness and humility in one’s study of Scripture while Castellio promoted an inflated pride.¹⁶⁵ Thus, as Calvin so

revelation of the Spirit, and long for an interpreter to be given to us...”

¹⁶² *Comm.* on Psa 119:12, CTS, 410. Cf. *Comm.* on Acts 8:31, CC, 246-247: “And there must certainly be very little hope of a man who is swollen-headed with confidence in his own abilities ever proving himself docile. That is also why the reading of Scripture bears fruit with such a few people today, because scarcely one in a hundred is to be found who gladly submits himself to teaching. For as long as nearly all men feel ashamed by the consciousness of their ignorance..., in his pride each one prefers to nurse his ignorance, rather than appear to be the pupil of other men. Yes, and what is more, the majority superciliously take it upon themselves to instruct others.”

¹⁶³ *Comm.* on Psa 25:14, CTS, 430. Cf. *Comm.* on Isa 50:10, CTS, 61: “We see how audaciously doctrine is rejected by those who, in other respects, wish to be reckoned acute and sagacious; for, in consequence of being swelled with pride, they detest modesty and humility, and are exceedingly stupid in this wisdom of God.”

¹⁶⁴ *The Secret Providence of God*, 340-343. Helm has arrived at a similar conclusion: “That Calvin is suspicious of axiomatic theology of any kind appears from his almost universal suspicion of human reason or common sense as a source of theological knowledge. In Calvin’s book any theological appeal of this kind is bound to be suspect, and ought to fail. The reason it ought to fail is that it almost invariably takes the one who proposes it away from the text of Scripture.” See, Helm, “Calvin (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence”, 401-402.

¹⁶⁵ *The Secret Providence of God*, 348: “But let Christian readers here mark the difference which exists between you and me. I ever affirm that the wisest among men, until they become fools, and, bidding farewell to all their own wisdom, give themselves up humbly and meekly to the obedience of Christ, are blinded by their own pride, and

succinctly put it,

To be adequate disciples of Him, we must put away all confidence in our own intellect and seek light from heaven, abandoning the foolish notion of free will, we must yield ourselves to God's direction. Paul is right to bid men become fools, to be wise unto God (1 Cor. 3:18), for there is no worse screen to block out the light of the Spirit than confidence in our own intelligence.¹⁶⁶

The admission of one's ignorance does not preclude, therefore, one's diligence in seeking out the true meaning of Scripture. For diligence coupled with a true reverence for Scripture will ultimately yield its desired result.¹⁶⁷ David is a fine example of one who, through diligence and prayer, derived just such a result.¹⁶⁸ Calvin never tires of emphasising this

remain utterly unable to taste one drop of heavenly doctrine. For all human reason is tasteless in the mysteries of God, and all human perspicacity blind. I maintain, therefore, that the beginning and essence of all divine wisdom is humility. This strips us of all the wisdom of the flesh, and prepares us to enter upon the mysteries of God with reverence and faith. You, on the contrary, bid ignorant and untaught men to come forth into public; men who, despising all learning and inflated with pride alone, rashly attempt to pass their judgment on divine things. Nor will you acknowledge any to be legitimate judges in divine matters, but those who, content with the opinion of reason and common sense, unceremoniously reject all which does not just suit their own mind and taste."

¹⁶⁶ *Comm.* on Luke 24:45, CC, 245.

¹⁶⁷ *Comm.* on Psa 25:14, CTS, 430: "Moreover, when piety reigns in the heart, we need have no fear of losing our labour in seeking God. It is indeed true, that the covenant of God is a secret which far exceeds human comprehension; but as we know that he does not in vain enjoin us to seek him, we may rest assured that all those who endeavour to serve him with an upright desire will be brought, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to the knowledge of that heavenly wisdom which is appointed for their salvation." Cf. *Comm.* on Psa 119:130, CTS, 11: "Although it is not given to all men to attain to the highest degree in this wisdom, yet it is common to all the godly to profit so far as to know the certain and unerring rule by which to regulate their life. Thus no man who surrenders himself to the teaching of God, will loose his labour in his school, for from his first entrance he will reap inestimable fruit... By affirming that *the little ones are enlightened*, David intimates, that it is only when men, divested of all self-confidence, submit themselves with humble and docile minds to God, that they are in a proper state for becoming proficient scholars in the study of the divine law... God will not, therefore, disappoint the desire of such as acknowledge their own ignorance, and submit themselves humbly to his teaching."

¹⁶⁸ *Comm.* on Psa 86:11, CTS, 387-388: "Farther, his prayer to be taught in the ways of the Lord does not imply that he had been previously altogether ignorant of divine truth;

element with respect to the Ethiopian eunuch.¹⁶⁹ So convinced is Calvin of the objective reliability of such reverence and diligence in achieving the desired results in terms of hermeneutics and theology that he is certain that anyone who studies Scripture in such fashion, with the aid of the Holy Spirit,¹⁷⁰ would be "safe from the danger of error as long as they search

but well aware of the much darkness - of the many clouds of ignorance in which he was still enveloped, he aspires after greater improvement. Let it also be observed, that he is not to be understood as speaking only of external teaching: but having the law among his hands, he prays for the inward light of the Holy Spirit, that he may not labour in the unprofitable task of learning only the letter; according as he prays in another place, 'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law,' (Ps. cxix. 18) If a prophet so distinguished, and so richly endued with the graces of the Holy Spirit, makes such a frank and cordial confession of his own ignorance, how great our folly if we feel not our own deficiency and are not stirred up to greater diligence in self-improvement from the knowledge of our slender attainments! And, assuredly, the more progress a man has made in the knowledge of the true religion, the more sensible will he be that he is far from the mark. Secondly, it is necessary to add, that reading or hearing is not enough, unless God impart to us inward light by his Spirit."

¹⁶⁹ *Comm.* on Acts 8:28, CC, 246: "Again, if many things were hidden from him, yet the irksomeness of it did not make him throw the book aside. There is no doubt that this is the way we also must read Scripture; we ought to accept eagerly and with a ready mind those things which are clear, and in which God reveals His mind; but it is proper to pass by those things which are still obscure to us, until a clearer light shines. But if we shall not be wearied by reading, the final result will be that constant use will make us familiar with Scripture." *Comm.* on Acts 8:34, CC, 251: "It is evident from this how passionately eager the eunuch was to learn. He wanders about among the many prophecies of Isaiah as if through uncertain labyrinthine ways, and yet he does not grow weary of reading... So, if we are conscious of our ignorance and do not disdain to submit ourselves to learning, the Lord will also present Himself as a teacher to us children. And just as the seed lies hidden for a time under the ground where it has been cast, so the Lord, by the illumination of His Spirit will cause a reading, that is sterile, unfruitful and producing nothing but boredom, to take on the clear light of understanding. Indeed the Lord never keeps the eyes of His own so closed that the way of salvation in Scripture does not profit immediately from their reading."

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Comm.* on John 14:25, CC, 88: "This admonition is very useful to everyone; for if we do not understand at once what Christ teaches, pride overcomes us and we cannot be bothered to spend unprofitable labour on what is obscure. But we must bring a ready teachableness; we must listen hard and pay attention if we want to progress properly in the school of God. Most of all, we need patience until the Spirit makes plain what we seemed to have often read or heard in vain. That the zeal for learning may not grow weak in us or that we may not slip into despair when we do not immediately perceive that meaning of what Christ says, let us know that this is spoken to us all: The *Spirit will* at last *bring to your remembrance* what I have said... We must therefore wait patiently and calmly for the time of revelation and not reject the Word on that account. Again, when Christ declares that it is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to teach the apostles what they had already learned from his own mouth, it follows that outward preaching will be useless and vain unless the teaching of the Spirit is added to it. So God has two ways of teaching. He sounds in our ears by the mouth of men; and He addresses us inwardly by His Spirit. These He does simultaneously or at different times, as He thinks fit."

the Scriptures with a humble and modest will to learn what is right and true.”¹⁷¹

This centrality of piety to Calvin’s hermeneutics is highlighted in Book 1, especially in his treatment of the Trinity.¹⁷² It is significant that Calvin should begin his discussion of Anti-Trinitarian heresies in *Inst.* 1.13¹⁷³ with a full discussion of the hermeneutical limit. For, as he says, it is here, indeed, if anywhere in the mysteries of Scripture that “we ought to play the philosopher soberly and with great moderation”;¹⁷⁴ in a word, one must keep within the limit of piety. It is not to be wondered, therefore, that he should charge the Arians who “hated and curse the word *homousios*” with impiety.¹⁷⁵ On three occasions, he pointed to Servetus’ impiety for not holding to a Scriptural view of the Trinity.¹⁷⁶ When discussing the eternity of the Word, while recognising that certain names may be attributed to God

¹⁷¹ *Comm.* on Matt. 22:29, CC, 30.

¹⁷² Gerrish has noted the same connection: “In his chapter on the Trinity (Book 1, chap. 13), the concern for piety is negatively expressed by Calvin in several ways: in his direct warning against idle speculations, in his refusal to follow his mentor Augustine in the quest for psychological analogies of the trinity, and in his dismissal of the ‘silly’ notion of an eternal generation of the Son. Positively, he ends with the claim that his summary will have satisfied those who impose a limit on their curiosity, if not those who intemperately delight in speculation.” B A Gerrish, “Theology within the Limits of Piety Alone: Schleiermacher and Calvin’s Notion of God” in his *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 206.

¹⁷³ Calvin devotes *Inst.* 1.13.21-29 to a refutation of anti-Trinitarian heresies. Another doctrine where he placed a similar emphasis upon the refutation of heresies related to it is the two natures of Christ, *Inst.* 2.13.1-2 and 2.14.4-8. It should be noted, however, that for Calvin, these two doctrines are so closely connected that heresies arising from one will inevitably result in heresies in the other. This is made very evident by Calvin in the introduction to his treatment of the heresies arising from the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. He refuses to discuss the divinity of Christ and concentrates on proving his humanity because, as he says, “The divinity of Christ has been proved elsewhere by clear and firm testimonies” [see *Inst.* 2.13.1 (474)], a clear reference to *Inst.* 1.13.21-29. Calvin clearly sees the divinity of Christ as critical to both the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ.

¹⁷⁴ Note Calvin’s introductory remarks to *Inst.* 1.13.21-29 for they are the very same remarks which Calvin employed to define his hermeneutical limits, as we have observed on page 137ff. of this chapter. Thus, it can be said that for Calvin the hermeneutical limit is no different from the limit of piety.

¹⁷⁵ *Inst.* 1.13.4 (125).

¹⁷⁶ *Inst.* 1.13.10 (133); 1.13.22 (148); 1.13.23 (149).

with respect to his outward activity (as when he is called Creator of heaven and earth), Calvin insists that “piety recognises or allows no name which intimates that anything new has happened to God in himself”.¹⁷⁷ To deny the divine goodness of the eternal Word of God is impiety.¹⁷⁸ The upright fathers who “truly affirmed that a trinity of persons subsists in the one God”, had “piety in their hearts”.¹⁷⁹ To conceive of the Trinity in any other way is “the sheerest impiety”;¹⁸⁰ for pious experience itself informs us that both the Son and the Spirit are divine like the Father.¹⁸¹ Thus, for Calvin, all these Anti-Trinitarian heresies arise because of the lack of piety on the part of those who promote them. Indeed, Calvin traces the root of all heresies to the lack of piety. Arrogance, he says, is the true root of all heresies.¹⁸² Arrogance and presumption is almost the mother of all heresies.¹⁸³ Drawing the

¹⁷⁷ *Inst.* 1.13.8 (130).

¹⁷⁸ *Inst.* 1.13.24 (151).

¹⁷⁹ *Inst.* 1.13.4 (125).

¹⁸⁰ *Inst.* 1.13.25 (154).

¹⁸¹ *Inst.* 1.13.13 (138): “By this we are taught not only that by the Son’s intercession do those things which the Heavenly Father bestows come to us but that by mutual participation in power the Son himself is the author of them. This practical knowledge is doubtless more certain and firmer than any idle speculation. There, indeed, does the pious mind perceive the very presence of God, and almost touches him, when it feels itself quickened, illumined, preserved, justified, and sanctified.” Also, *Inst.* 1.13.14 (138): “For what Scripture attributes to him and we ourselves learn by the sure experience of godliness is far removed from the creatures. For it is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth. Because he is circumscribed by no limits, he is excepted from the category of creatures; but in transfusing into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement, he is indeed plainly divine.” Calvin elsewhere claims that pious experience itself shows us in the divine unity God the Father, his Son, and the Spirit. See his French *Catechisme* (1537), translated as *Instruction in Faith* (1537), trans. Paul T Fuhrmann (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949), 46.

¹⁸² “Now here is the source from which such foolish opinions (or rather chimeras, which have no substance whatsoever and yet which are often received as if they were revelations from heaven) proceed today. To be brief, since arrogance is the true root of all heresies, preposterous fantasies, and false, wicked opinions, it is not surprising that God allows to fall into such follies those who have not held fast to the true rule for persevering in the obedience to his truth, i.e., to humble oneself in the fear of God.” See, John Calvin, “A Warning Against Judiciary Astrology and Other Prevalent Curiosities”, trans. Mary Potter in *Calvin Theological Journal* 18 (1983): 163.

¹⁸³ *Against the Libertines*, 207: “Now beyond this common factor, and almost the mother of all heresies – being arrogance or presumption – if we look closely at the matter, we

distinction between schism and heresy, Calvin notes that "heresy is the root and source of schism"; but it is "jealousy and pride" which "is the mother of nearly every heresy".¹⁸⁴ Elsewhere he writes:

Therefore ambition is the mother of all heresies. For the purity of the Word of God flourishes when pastors gain disciples for Christ with a common zeal; because the state of the Church is sound only when he is the one Master that is heard... But just as this verse teaches that nearly all corruptions of doctrine flow from the pride of men, when each one eagerly desires to be more prominent than is allowed, so again we gather from the same source that it is hardly possible that ambitious men will not turn aside from the proper purity and adulterate the Word of God.¹⁸⁵

It should not be overlooked that, for Calvin, true piety exists in believers only.¹⁸⁶ Though "God, it is true, addressed his word indiscriminately to the righteous and the wicked", men "do not comprehend it, unless they have sincere piety; just as Isaiah, chap. xxix. 11, says, that as regards the ungodly, the law is like 'a book that is sealed'".¹⁸⁷ Thus, as with his

will find that there are two reasons why so many people have fallen into this error."

¹⁸⁴ *Comm.* on 1 Cor. 11:19, CC, 238.

¹⁸⁵ *Comm.* on Acts 20:30, CC, 185.

¹⁸⁶ *Inst.* 1.4.4 (50): "From it one may easily grasp anew how much this confused knowledge of God differs from the piety from which religion takes its source, which is instilled in the breasts of believers only."

¹⁸⁷ *Comm.* on Psa 25:14, CTS, 431. To see the distinction so clearly drawn by Calvin between believers and unbelievers, it is worthwhile quoting the context from which this citation was taken (see, *ibid.*, 430-431): "Moreover, when piety reigns in the heart, we need have no fear of losing our labour in seeking God. It is indeed true, that the covenant of God is a secret which far exceeds human comprehension; but as we know that he does not in vain enjoin us to seek him, we may rest assured that all those who endeavour to serve him with an upright desire will be brought, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to the knowledge of that heavenly wisdom which is appointed for their salvation. But, in the meantime, David indirectly rebukes those who falsely and groundlessly boast that they are interested in the covenant of God, while they rest merely in the letter of the law, and have no saving impressions of the fear of God. God, it is true, addresses his word indiscriminately to the righteous and the wicked; but men

soteriological emphasis on faith above, Calvin insists that only believers (who alone have true piety) can have a proper and true knowledge of God. This is further evidenced by the close connection Calvin sees between “faith” and “piety”. Commenting on the Berean Christians, he equates entry into the faith with “renouncing our fleshly understanding” – a mark of piety – and “showing ourselves docile and obedient to Christ”. He believes that Luke’s praise of their “piety and faith” was on account of their readiness and eagerness “to receive the Gospel” followed by their desire to strengthen their faith through a diligent inquiry of Scripture. While Luke does not state that faith was complete in all its aspects in their case, he nevertheless relates “how they were initiated into Christ” and the “sort of advances they made in faith”.¹⁸⁸ In another context, Calvin was able to affirm that “it is only by faith, which is the one and only foundation of piety, that God is worshipped correctly, so that our devotional acts are pleasing to him.” In addition, it must be remembered that “the one and only foundation of correct and orthodox faith is to subject oneself to Scripture, and reverently embrace its teaching.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, both piety and faith are intimately related and, when discussed in relation to hermeneutics, must be considered within their soteriological context.

It should be apparent by now that for Calvin there can be no true knowledge of God without the interplay of all these elements in his thinking on the subject of hermeneutics.¹⁹⁰ The Scripture reveals the true God to us.

do not comprehend it, unless they have sincere piety; just as Isaiah, chap. xxix. 11, says, that as regards the ungodly, the law is like ‘a book that is sealed’. And, therefore, it is no wonder that there is here made a distinction between those who truly serve God, and to whom he makes known his secret, and the wicked or hypocrites.”

¹⁸⁸ *Comm.* on Acts 17:11, CC, 100-102.

¹⁸⁹ Both statements were made by Calvin in his *Comm.* on Acts 24.14, CC, 251-252.

¹⁹⁰ An appropriate summary of Calvin’s hermeneutics would, from the foregoing discussion, include the following elements: it (1) presupposes the authority of Scripture; (2) is committed to the perspicuity of Scripture (which is modelled upon the principle of divine accommodation and finds its precedence in Scripture itself); (3) is modelled upon the principles of interpretation employed by both Christ and the human authors of Scripture (for instance, The Epistle to the Hebrews is an excellent model for interpretation of types and analogies); (4) necessitates the illumination of God’s Spirit; (5) requires faith on the part of the reader; (6) recognises the limits of piety – anti-speculative, reverential agnosticism, humility and modesty (as opposed to pride and arrogance); (7) aims at edification.

While it does not reveal everything about God, it reveals accurately and simply all that we need to know about him. But this objective perspicuity is no guarantee that the reader of Scripture will automatically understand what Scripture reveals. This is because man, by virtue of his finiteness and sinful nature, is incapable of understanding what he reads in Scripture. The Holy Spirit's work of illumination is, therefore, absolutely necessary. However, for this illumination to be effective man must come in faith to Scripture. But faith alone is not sufficient. For faith, as Calvin will insist, is a correlate of piety. As such, there must also be piety if there is to be any benefit at all.

That Calvin consistently employs all the above elements in his exposition of divine providence will become evident as we now examine the relationship of his hermeneutics to that exposition.

IV. CALVIN'S HERMENEUTICS AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE

A careful examination of the *locus classicus* will reveal that what undergirds Calvin's exposition of divine providence is Scripture. Of the sixty-six books of Scripture, Calvin refers to thirty-eight of them.¹⁹¹ This extensive use of Scripture indicates that Calvin is committed to and dependent upon the authority of Scripture for his exposition of divine providence. Calvin himself alludes to this when he insists at the end of his exposition that whatever he has written is "attested by clear Scriptural proofs" and is "taught in Sacred Scripture".¹⁹² However, Calvin also highlights the necessity of adopting the right hermeneutical approach to the subject of divine providence. He thus writes:

Let those for whom this seems harsh consider for a little while how

¹⁹¹ Of the remaining twenty-eight books to which Calvin makes no direct reference, fourteen are from the Old Testament and fourteen are from the New Testament. That it was never Calvin's intention to cite every instance of God's providence is clear from *Inst.* 1.18.1 (231): "Those who are moderately versed in the Scriptures see that for the sake of brevity I have put forward only a few of many testimonies."

¹⁹² *Inst.* 1.18.4 (237).

bearable their squeamishness is in refusing a thing attested by clear Scriptural proofs because it exceeds their mental capacity, and find fault that things are put forth publicly, which if God had not judged useful for men to know, he would never have bidden his prophets and apostles to teach. For our wisdom ought to be nothing else than to embrace with humble teachableness, and at least without finding fault, whatever is taught in Sacred Scripture. Those who too insolently scoff, even though it is clear enough that they are prating against God, are not worthy of a longer refutation.¹⁹³

In the above statement Calvin pinpoints some of the crucial elements in his hermeneutical approach. There is the humble acknowledgement of the incapacity of the human mind to grasp fully the subject of divine providence as presented in Scripture (“because it exceeds their mental capacity”). The perspicuity of the Scriptural revelation concerning divine providence is real and unambiguous (“clear Scriptural proofs” and “useful for men to know”). The need to observe the limits of piety, especially humility (“humble teachableness”) as opposed to pride (“squeamishness”, “refusing”, “find fault”, “finding fault”), is emphasised. Last but not least, the aim of God’s revelation with respect to divine providence in Scripture and, therefore, the aim for which it should be expounded is edification (“useful for men to know”). It is surely significant that Calvin should highlight all these elements of his hermeneutics at the end of his exposition on divine providence for it seems to indicate his own estimate of the indispensability of a proper hermeneutic to that exposition. The evidence, however, is not confined to just the above statement; it is found throughout the *locus classicus*.

For example, Calvin believes that Scripture is perspicuous about God’s providence.¹⁹⁴ As such, he states candidly that Scripture clearly

¹⁹³ *Inst.* 1.18.4 (237).

¹⁹⁴ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (232-233): “While hitherto I have recounted only those things which are *openly* and *unambiguously* related in Scripture, let those who do not hesitate to brand the heavenly oracles with sinister marks of ignominy see what kind of censure they

teaches that divine providence is opposed to fortune and fortuitous happenings.¹⁹⁵ He says that “special providence” is declared by such “sure and clear testimonies of Scripture that it is a wonder anyone can have doubts about it.”¹⁹⁶ Indeed, “Scripture, to express more plainly that nothing at all in the world” happens without God’s determination, shows that even what the human mind conceives of as merely fortuitous is subject to God.¹⁹⁷ That God’s singular providence watches over the welfare of his own is testified to by “very many and clear promises” of Scripture.¹⁹⁸ Calvin repeatedly appeals to Scripture only because there are within it clear examples of God’s singular providence.¹⁹⁹ In view of this perspicuity of Scripture concerning God’s providence, Calvin confidently discusses the three aspects related to it.²⁰⁰

Calvin assumes that this perspicuity is founded upon the principle of divine accommodation. To the objection that his account of God’s repentance is not consistent with Scripture,²⁰¹ Calvin’s response is that “because of our weakness”, Scripture accommodates the concept of God’s repentance to “our capacity” by “representing himself to us not as

use.” [Italics for emphasis, mine.]

¹⁹⁵ *Inst.* 1.16.2 (198): “That this difference may better appear, we must know that God’s providence, as it is taught in Scripture, is opposed to fortune and fortuitous happenings.”

¹⁹⁶ *Inst.* 1.16.4 (203).

¹⁹⁷ *Inst.* 1.16.6 (205).

¹⁹⁸ *Inst.* 1.17.6 (218).

¹⁹⁹ *Inst.* 1.16.9 (209): “But how God by the bridle of his providence turns every event whatever way he wills, will be clear from this remarkable example”. Cf. *Inst.* 1.18.1 (229): “But particular examples will shed more light...” *Inst.* 1.18.1 (230-231): “We very often find in the Sacred History that whatever happens proceeds from the Lord, as for instance the defection of the ten tribes [1 Kings 11:31], the death of Eli’s sons [1 Sam 2:34], and very many examples of this sort.”

²⁰⁰ See *Inst.* 1.17.1 (210-211) where Calvin outlines these aspects of God’s providence so clearly stated in Scripture.

²⁰¹ *Inst.* 1.17.12-14 (225-228).

he is in himself, but as he seems to us".²⁰² What is significant for our purpose is that while admitting to the incapacity of man to understand God "as he is in himself",²⁰³ and thus the need for a mode of speaking that describes God for us in "human terms", Calvin insists in the same breath that this divine accommodation is to ensure that "we may understand" the concept of God's repentance. Thus, the aim of God's accommodation is to ensure that man can understand, through Scripture, what he normally is incapable of comprehending without the aid of Scripture. In a word, the perspicuity of Scripture implies the simplicity of its teaching.

The principle of divine accommodation also explains why Calvin insists upon the need for caution whenever he introduces the subject of divine providence in his writings.²⁰⁴ For divine providence is one of the "hidden" and "secret" things of God.²⁰⁵ Calvin considers the chief aspect of divine providence to be that God "directs everything by his incomprehensible wisdom and disposes them to his own end."²⁰⁶ He also describes it as follows: "infinitely sublime and wholly incomprehensible... secret counsels... mysteries so deep and so profoundly adorable".²⁰⁷ And yet, as he so clearly states in *Inst.* 1.17.2, while God's plans in governing the universe is incomprehensible, because "God illumines the minds of his own with the spirit of discernment...for the understanding of these

²⁰² *Inst.* 1.17.13 (227). This section of the *Institutes* forms the basis for the rest of the discussion found in this paragraph.

²⁰³ This has already been echoed in Calvin's reluctance to speculate on the essence of God because God's essence is incomprehensible. See page 141f. of this Chapter.

²⁰⁴ Section X.4 of *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 165, for example, is entitled, "Exposition of providence requires discretion". Cf. *The Secret Providence of God*, 227-229.

²⁰⁵ These are two of Calvin's favourite words for expressing the inscrutability and incomprehensibility of the order, reason, end, and necessity of divine providence. They are found frequently in *Inst.* 1.16-18 and twice Calvin used the phrase, "God's secret providence", *Inst.* 1.16.9 (209), 1.17.2 (213); and once, "God's hidden providence", *Inst.* 1.18.4 (235).

²⁰⁶ *Inst.* 1.16.4 (202).

²⁰⁷ *The Secret Providence of God*, 228. Cf. *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 165.

mysteries which he has deigned to reveal by his Word, now no abyss is here".²⁰⁸ Thus, the tension Calvin held between the two consequences of the principle of divine accommodation for his doctrine of God mentioned earlier on holds true for his doctrine of divine providence as well. Similarly, the hermeneutical limit Calvin imposed upon the discussion of the essence of God and the divine Trinity is imposed on his discussion of divine providence.²⁰⁹

Calvin's recognition of the different literary genres found in Scripture is also evident. With respect to God's repentance, Calvin says it should be taken figuratively.²¹⁰ There is a very important hermeneutical principle for doing so: it is that Scripture does not contradict itself. Where there is an apparent contradiction, the aim should be to try and harmonize it in a way consistent with Scripture.²¹¹ As Helm so helpfully points out, the way Calvin went about doing this is as follows:

Calvin argues that when repentance is ascribed to God it does not imply ignorance or error or powerlessness, and that the fact that Scripture also says that God does not repent and is unchangeable shows that repentance can only be figuratively ascribed to God. Thus, for Calvin texts such as 1 Samuel 15:29 and Numbers 23:19 take precedence over those such as Genesis 6:6 or 1 Samuel 15:11.²¹²

²⁰⁸ It is worth noting that this section reveals the Scriptural basis for Calvin's unvarying application of this particular aspect of his hermeneutic. Helm, in "Calvin (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence", 401, has similarly observed: "While plainly revealed in Scripture, providence is secret, mysterious, a great abyss, and so forth."

²⁰⁹ See page 141ff. of this chapter.

²¹⁰ *Inst.* 1.17.12 (226): "When God repents of having made Saul king," he writes, "the change of mind is to be taken figuratively".

²¹¹ When discussing the subject of God repenting of the appointment of Saul as king and referring to two seemingly contradictory passages, namely, 1 Sam 15:11 and 1 Sam 15:29, Calvin writes: "And we must note that in the same chapter both are so joined together that the comparison well harmonizes the apparent disagreement." See, *Inst.* 1.17.12 (226).

²¹² Cf. Helm, "John Calvin and Divine Accommodation", 42.

Not to be overlooked is Calvin's assumption of the necessity of the Spirit's illumination and the corollary need for faith and piety if one is to understand the Scriptural account of divine providence. That Scripture is perspicuous does not guarantee that what it reveals is perspicuous to the reader.²¹³ The reason is simple: natural human opinion cannot understand divine providence though it is clearly taught in Scripture. The "sluggishness of our mind lies far beneath the height of God's providence".²¹⁴ The "order, reason, end, and necessity of those things which happen for the most part lie hidden in God's purpose, and are not apprehended by human opinion".²¹⁵ What is needed, therefore, is God's illumination. Only as God gives man the spirit of discernment can he understand these mysteries related to divine providence.²¹⁶ Indeed, Calvin is so certain of the reality of the illuminating work of the Spirit, he declares unequivocally that his exposition of divine providence is no figment of his own brain but what the Holy Spirit has repeatedly taught everywhere and in innumerable forms of expressions.²¹⁷ For this reason, Calvin takes to task those who misconstrue the repentance of God as the same as

²¹³ See page 156ff. of this chapter.

²¹⁴ *Inst.* 1.16.9 (208). Cf. *Inst.* 1.18.3 (234): "But even though his will is one and simple in him, it appears manifold to us because, on account of our mental incapacity, we cannot grasp how in divers ways it wills and does not will something to take place... Because God's wisdom appears manifold..., ought we therefore, on account of the sluggishness of our understanding, to dream that there is any variation in God himself...?"

²¹⁵ *Inst.* 1.16.9 (208).

²¹⁶ *Inst.* 1.17.2 (213): "God illumines the minds of his own with the spirit of discernment...for the understanding of these mysteries which he has deigned to reveal by his Word, now no abyss is here; rather, a way in which we ought to walk in safety, and a lamp to guide our feet..., the light of life..., and the school of sure and clear truth." The Spirit's work is not confined merely to illuminating the mind; it also includes guidance and obedience to God upon understanding of what has been revealed in Scripture, as Calvin so clearly states in *Inst.* 1.17.3 (214-215): "But rather let them enquire and learn from Scripture what is pleasing to God so that they may strive toward this under the Spirit's guidance. At the same time, being ready to follow God wherever he calls, they will show in very truth that nothing is more profitable than the knowledge of this doctrine."

²¹⁷ *Inst.* 1.17.2 (212): "As if what we teach were a figment of our brain, and the Holy Spirit did not everywhere expressly declare the same thing and repeat it in innumerable forms of expressions."

man's, accept the concept of divine permission, and teach that God has two contrary wills; for they all arise from a rejection of what the Holy Spirit has clearly intended in Scripture.²¹⁸

No less significant is Calvin's emphasis upon the necessity for faith and piety, and that within a soteriological context. He begins the *locus classicus* with the necessity of faith, as opposed to carnal reason, if one is to accord with the Scriptural view of divine providence.²¹⁹ In one of his most extended treatments on the incapacity of human reason to comprehend God's providence, he contrasts it with faith in the following manner: "what for us seems a contingency, faith recognizes to have been a secret impulse from God".²²⁰ In Calvin's view, this faith is "founded upon God's Sacred Word",²²¹ and that it is this faith alone which can dispel all

²¹⁸ *Inst.* 1.17.12 (226): "But that is far removed from the intention of the Holy Spirit, who in the very reference to repentance says that God is not moved by compunction because he is not a man so that he can repent [1 Sam 15:29]." *Inst.* 1.18.2 (231): "These instances may refer, also, to divine permission... But since the Spirit clearly expresses the fact that blindness and insanity are inflicted by God's just judgment [Rom 1:20-24], such a solution is too absurd." *Inst.* 1.18.3 (233): "For it is easy to dispose of their first objection, that if nothing happens apart from God's will, there are in him two contrary wills, because by his secret plan he decrees what he has openly forbidden by his law. Yet before I answer, I should like my readers again to be warned that this cavil is not hurled against me but against the Holy Spirit..."

²¹⁹ *Inst.* 1.16.1 (197): "For even though the minds of the impious too are compelled by merely looking upon earth and heaven to rise up to the Creator, yet *faith* has its own peculiar way of assigning the whole credit for Creation to God. To this pertains that saying of the apostle's to which we have referred before [see 1.5.14], that only "by *faith* we understand that the universe was created by the word of God" [Heb 11:3]. For unless we pass on to his providence - however we may seem both to comprehend with the mind and to confess with the tongue - we do not yet properly grasp what it means to say: "God is Creator". *Carnal* sense, once confronted with the power of God in the very Creation, stops there, and at most weighs and contemplates only the wisdom, power and goodness of the author in accomplishing such handiwork... In short, *carnal* sense thinks there is an energy divinely bestowed from the beginning, sufficient to sustain all things. But *faith* ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver - not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow [cf. Matth 10:29]." [Italics for emphasis, mine.]

²²⁰ *Inst.* 1.16.9 (208-210). Cf. *Inst.* 1.16.2: "Carnal reason ascribes all such happenings, whether prosperous or adverse, to fortune. But anyone who has been taught by Christ's lips... will go farther afield for a cause, and will consider that all events are governed by God's secret plan."

²²¹ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (233): "Even our faith (because, founded upon God's Sacred Word, it is above the whole world [cf. 1 John 5:4]) from its lofty height despises these clouds."

the errors related to divine providence promoted by its opponents.²²² Calvin had no doubts that what accounted for these errors is his opponents' dependence on human rationality alone. Their purely rational approach results in nothing more than imagination, fancy or novelty.²²³ But faith is "above the whole world", meaning, that it is supra-rational.²²⁴ And because it is so, it can penetrate beyond what is merely rational. Thus, "philosophers teach and human minds conceive that all parts of the universe are quickened by God's secret inspiration. Yet they do not reach as far as David is carried, bearing with him all the godly", because the former lacks faith but the latter does not.²²⁵

Similarly, piety, like faith, is absolutely indispensable to a proper understanding of divine providence as revealed in Scripture. The need for piety arises from the fact that "men's dispositions are inclined to vain subtleties".²²⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that David should indirectly reprove "the madness of men in the very unbridled license with which, out

²²² Calvin discusses this especially in relation to the question of God's will. See *Inst.* 1.18.3 (232-233).

²²³ *Inst.* 1.17.2 (212): "Hence it happens that today so many dogs assail this doctrine with their venomous bitings, or at least with barking: for they wish nothing to be lawful for God beyond what their own reason prescribes." This is implied in his castigation of the Epicureans in *Inst.* 1.16.4 (202): "I say nothing of the Epicureans... who *imagine* that God is idle and indolent; and others just as foolish, who of old *fancied* that God so rules above the middle region of the air that he left the lower regions to fortune." Cf. *Inst.* 1.16.3 (200): "And truly God claims, and would have us grant him, omnipotence – not the empty, idle, and almost unconscious sort that the Sophists *imagine*..." Also, *Inst.* 1.16.8 (207): "Even though we are unwilling to quarrel over words, yet we do not admit the word 'fate', both because it is one of those words whose profane *novelties* Paul teaches us to avoid..." [Italics mine, for emphasis.]

²²⁴ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (233).

²²⁵ *Inst.* 1.16.1 (198). Cf. A similar contrast between philosophers and believers is drawn in *Inst.* 1.16.3 (200): "For he is deemed omnipotent, not because he can indeed act, yet sometimes ceases and sits in idleness, or continues by a general impulse that order of nature which he previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation. For when, in The Psalms, it is said that "he does whatever he wills" [Ps 115:3; cf. Ps 113(b):3, Vg], a certain and deliberate will is meant. For it would be senseless to interpret the words of the prophet after the manner of the philosophers, that God is the first agent because he is the beginning and cause of all motion..."

²²⁶ *Inst.* 1.17.1 (210).

of their own filthiness, they not only argue against God, but claim for themselves the power to condemn him".²²⁷ For Calvin, then, it is impiety which lies at the heart of the errors promoted by his opponents, whether it be equating providence with fortune,²²⁸ or separating God's power from his justice,²²⁹ or teaching that God has two contrary wills.²³⁰ Calvin sums up the rule of piety with respect to divine providence as follows:

But these calumnies, or rather ravings of distracted men, will be easily dispersed by pious and holy meditation on providence, which the rule of piety dictates to us, so that from this we may receive the best and sweetest fruit.²³¹

Commenting on Deut 29:29, Calvin indicates that Moses "bid us not only direct our study to meditation upon the law, but to look up to God's secret providence with awe."²³² That means, the act of "pious and holy meditation on providence" must include the element of awe. Indeed, Calvin goes on to add that the purpose of the Book of Job is to declare God's secret providence with such sublimity as "to humble our minds". Both of these are reiterated by Calvin in different ways in the *locus classicus*. Moderation must be exercised and reverence is most becoming with respect to God's secret

²²⁷ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (233). Calvin uses different terms to describe impiety, for instance, "ravings of distracted men", *Inst.* 1.17.6 (218); "rashness" and "haughtily revile", 1.17.1 (212); "vomit forth these blasphemies", 1.17.2 (212); "profane men with their absurdities foolishly raise and uproar", 1.17.3 (215).

²²⁸ *Inst.* 1.16.6 (205): "Thus, also, another prophet rebukes the impious who ascribe to men's toil, or to fortune, the fact that some lie in squalor and others rise up to honours."

²²⁹ *Inst.* 1.17.2 (214): "Not, indeed, that absolute will of which the Sophists babble, by an impious and profane distinction separating his justice from his power - but providence, that determinative principle of all things, from which flows nothing but right, although the reasons have been hidden from us."

²³⁰ *Inst.* 1.18.3 (233): "Indeed, an example of such petulance is not new, for in every age there have been impious and profane men, who have frothed and snarled against this portion of doctrine."

²³¹ *Inst.* 1.17.6 (218).

²³² *Inst.* 1.17.2 (213).

judgments.²³³ When we cannot understand how God wills to take place what he forbids to be done, let us not only recall our “mental incapacity” and that God is an unapproachable light; but let us also follow the example of “godly and modest folk” who accept that God’s will is one and simple in him.²³⁴ In a word, as Calvin so aptly put it at the end of his exposition of divine providence, “our wisdom ought to be nothing else than to embrace with humble teachableness, and at least without finding fault, whatever is taught in Sacred Scripture”.²³⁵

The soteriological emphasis is best expressed by Calvin in *Inst.* 1.17.6 where the rule of piety (“pious and holy meditation on providence”) is linked with the Christian. God’s providential care is not merely for the Christian’s “good”, but also for his “salvation”.²³⁶ The contrast between the response of the believer and unbeliever to the Scriptural doctrine of divine providence in this same section also highlights the soteriological emphasis. In contrast to the “ravings of distracted men”, the “Christian heart... will ever look to him as the principal cause of things.” Thus, unlike the unbeliever who attributes all adversity to fortune or chance, the Christian does not doubt it is

²³³ *Inst.* 1.17.1 (211-212): “But we must so cherish moderation that we do not try to make God render account to us, but so reverence his secret judgments as to consider his will the truly just cause of all things... For what is more absurd than to use this moderation toward our equals...; yet haughtily revile the hidden judgments of God, which we ought to hold in reverence?” Cf. *Inst.* 1.17.2 (213-214): “Therefore, since God assumes to himself the right (unknown to us) to rule the universe, let our law of soberness and moderation be to assent to his supreme authority...”

²³⁴ *Inst.* 1.18.4 (234).

²³⁵ *Inst.* 1.18.4 (237).

²³⁶ *Inst.* 1.17.6 (218): “But these calumnies, or rather ravings of distracted men, will be easily dispersed by pious and holy meditation on providence, which the rule of piety dictates to us, so that from this we may receive the best and sweetest fruit. Therefore the Christian heart, since it has been thoroughly persuaded that all things happen by God’s plan, and that nothing takes place by chance, will ever look to him as the principal cause of things, yet will give attention to the secondary causes in their proper place. Then the heart will not doubt that God’s singular providence keeps watch to preserve it, and will not suffer anything to happen but what may turn out to its good and salvation... As far as men are concerned, whether they are good or evil, the heart of the Christian will know that their plans, wills, efforts, and abilities are under God’s hand; that it is within his choice to bend them whither he pleases and constrain them whenever he pleases.”

due entirely to God's providence.²³⁷ The unbeliever transfers the government of the universe from God to the stars; the believer does not.²³⁸ The philosophers may subscribe to Paul's statement that we have our being and move and live in God, but believers go beyond that to a real earnest feeling of grace and taste God's special care and fatherly favour.²³⁹

The soteriological emphasis is also highlighted by Calvin's insistence that "the principal purpose of Biblical history is to teach that the Lord watches over the ways of the saints with such great diligence that they do not even stumble over a stone".²⁴⁰ There can be no doubt, therefore, that Calvin sees the greatest benefit of the Scriptural revelation of God's providence to be for the Christian. It is "believers" who can comfort themselves in times of adversity. It is the "servant of God" who is strengthened both by the promises and examples of God's providence in Scripture. Calvin can speak of the immeasurable felicity of the "godly" mind because when the light of divine providence has once shone upon him, he is relieved and set free not only from extreme anxiety and fear, but from every care. Moreover, it is the "saints" who alone may have assurance and abundant comfort when assailed either by the devil or wicked men.²⁴¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, Calvin sees his duty in this exposition to be nothing more nor less than "to achieve the perfect instruction and comfort of believers". For, as he adds in the same breath, "nothing whatsoever can be sufficient to satisfy the curiosity of vain men, nor ought we wish to satisfy it".²⁴² After all, as he writes

²³⁷ *Inst.* 1.16.9 (209): "What will the Christian think at this point? Just this: whatever happened in a death of this sort he will regard as fortuitous by nature, as it is; yet he will not doubt that God's providence exercised authority over fortune in directing its end." Cf. *Inst.* 1.16.2 (199).

²³⁸ *Inst.* 1.16.3 (201): "For example, the prophet forbids God's children 'to fear the stars and signs of heaven as disbelievers commonly do' [Jer 10:2p]. Surely he does not condemn every sort of fear. But when unbelievers transfer the government of the universe from God to the stars..."

²³⁹ *Inst.* 1.16.1 (198).

²⁴⁰ *Inst.* 1.17.6 (218).

²⁴¹ See *Inst.* 1.16.3 (200); 1.17.7 (219); 1.17.10 (223); and 1.17.11 (224) respectively.

²⁴² *Inst.* 1.17.12 (225).

elsewhere, God has endowed the minds of "his own" with the spirit of discernment so that they may understand divine providence as revealed in Scripture.²⁴³

Thus, it is obvious that Calvin's hermeneutical concerns are not divorced in any way from his exposition of divine providence. The perspicuity of Scripture, the principle of divine accommodation, the simplicity of Scripture, the necessity for the Spirit's illumination and for faith and piety on the part of the reader of Scripture are clearly integral to that exposition. They form, together with his commitment to the authority of Scripture, the bedrock upon which that exposition is based.

V. CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion has established cogently that, for Calvin, the interpretation of Scripture is closely tied to the authority of Scripture. Indeed, a hermeneutical approach which does not conform to the elements delineated above would, in Calvin's mind, inevitably undermine the authority of Scripture itself. This is especially evident in the case of those who claim to recognise the authority of Scripture but whose hermeneutics yields a result that belies that claim. As has already been noted, while Castellio in *The Secret Providence of God* may claim Scripture as his authority for opposing Calvin's concept of God, his hermeneutical approach reveals that it is not Scripture so much as his own understanding which is the final authority. Calvin notes that the Papists who claim Scripture as their authority are no different:

Therefore let those who wish to be wise and prudent, and to teach others properly, set this restriction before them, that they do not produce anything except from the pure fountain of Scripture. It is quite different with the philosophers, who fight with nothing but reasons, because there is no genuine authority among them; and

²⁴³ *Inst.* 1.17.2 (213).

the Papists are wrong in their excessive emulation of them, for, setting aside the oracles of God, they fall back only on the inventions of the human brain, that is, on mere foolishness.²⁴⁴

It is for this reason that Calvin keeps closely together his discussion of the authority of Scripture with that of hermeneutics both in his controversial writings and in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*.

Of equal significance is the relationship these chapters on Scripture in Book 1 bear to Calvin's intended *schema* in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*. As noted in the previous chapter, Calvin insists that the only way by which one can attain the true knowledge of God is through Scripture. Scripture has revealed not only that God is both infinite and spiritual. It also reveals him as Triune though one in essence. If, as we have observed in the previous chapter, Calvin was keen to oppose the false concepts of God involved in both imaginative and concrete idolatry with the pure monotheism of Scripture, it could be said that in introducing the doctrine of Scripture in *Inst.* 1.6-9, he was keen to oppose any false views of the one God which may arise from not only an inadequate view of the authority of Scripture but also a faulty interpretation of Scripture. That this is so is evident from the fact, as shown above, that hermeneutics actually plays such a key role in his exposition of the Trinity and, needless to say, of divine providence itself. This serves to confirm what has already been suggested right from the beginning of this chapter, viz., that any discussion of Calvin's treatment of the *duplex cognitio dei* and all the doctrines related to it, including divine providence, must take seriously not only his thinking on the authority of Scripture, but also all the other issues related to it, not least, the perspicuity and interpretation of Scripture and the necessity of faith and piety.

²⁴⁴ *Comm.* on Acts 28:23, CC, 310.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TRIUNE GOD OF PROVIDENCE

It is appropriate, before a discussion of Calvin's Trinitarian concern in the 1559 *Institutes* is attempted here, to recall what has been suggested by this study as the possible *schema* intended by Calvin in Book 1. Our examination thus far has shown that in the chapters preceding (*Inst.* 1.4-5) and following (*Inst.* 1.11-12) his treatment of the doctrine of Scripture and its correlates (*Inst.* 1.6-10), Calvin was keen to cut the ground from under both imaginative and concrete idolatry. And, as has been suggested in Chapter 4 of this study, Calvin's reply to these is the pure monotheism found in Scripture. The inclusion of the doctrine of the Trinity in *Inst.* 1.13 seems to indicate, however, that Calvin was seeking to do more than merely address, as it were, polytheism, atheism, deism, pantheism and dualism; nor was he merely offering the pure monotheism of Scripture as an alternative to any or all of these. For, as he has so clearly observed, the worship of one God does not necessarily exonerate the worshipper from the charge of idolatry. As long as the worship of the one God is not in accordance with the truth revealed in Scripture about him, "you have nothing left except an accursed idol".¹ So, a monotheist whose concept of God is not Scriptural is, in that respect, no better than a polytheistic idolater.

It is for this reason that the preceding chapters of this study are so crucial, for they provide the backdrop to Calvin's belief that his account of God the Creator is the Scriptural one as opposed to those who, like him, also claim Scripture as their source. As has been noted in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study, with those who were given to imaginative idolatry and to

¹ *Inst.* 1.4.3 (49): "Nor is it of much concern, at least in this circumstance, whether you conceive of one God or several; for you continually depart from the true God and forsake him, and, having left him, you have nothing left except an accursed idol." Note especially the phrase, "one God", for it affirms the observation that, for Calvin, any concept of God which is not true to Scripture even though it may be monotheistic is inadequate and lends itself to the charge of idolatry.

concrete idolatry, there was no real necessity to deal with the doctrine of Scripture nor the subject of hermeneutics since their source of the knowledge of God is not Scripture. In their case, it was quite sufficient for Calvin to point them to the fact that Scripture presents the true God as one.

But what of those who, like Calvin, actually claim to be not only monotheists, but also, Scripturally-based monotheists? The Romanists were one such instance as were the Anabaptists and Libertines. As Chapter 5 of this study has demonstrated, they were committed to some extent to the authority of Scripture. They could, therefore, say that their belief in the one God is based on Scripture. So also could the Jews who, like Calvin, recognised the Old Testament as their own Scripture. In that sense, they too could claim that their monotheism is based upon the Scriptural revelation of God.

It would seem that Calvin's final location of his treatment of the Trinity was dictated to some extent by this particular concern he has for those who claim to be monotheistic in their doctrine of God but whose monotheism does not square with the monotheism of Scripture. His inclusion of the doctrine of the Trinity where he did could then be seen as an attempt on his part to demonstrate how clearly inadequate, not to say mistaken, is the concept of God propounded by these so-called Scriptural monotheists. For, as Calvin would go on to show, if they claim that Scripture is their authority, then surely they would recognise that Scripture reveals not only that the true God is one; it also reveals that God is Triune. It is for this reason that Calvin begins his treatment of the Trinity with the statement that "God also designates himself by another special mark to distinguish himself more precisely from idols".² As we noted above, one may be a monotheist and still be an idolater. In a parallel manner, one may have a monotheistic concept of God; but if this sole God is not "contemplated in three persons", then it is nothing more than "the bare and empty name of God" which "flits about in our brains, to the

² *Inst.* 1.13.2 (122).

exclusion of the true God".³ Thus, to say that God is one without saying at the same time that he is Triune, in Calvin's view, would be not only to misread or misinterpret the Scriptural data about God altogether. It effectively reduces God to a mere idol.

The significance of the previous chapter on Calvin's concern for a Scriptural hermeneutic thus becomes clear. Calvin believes that his interpretation of the data concerning God the Creator as found in Scripture is in line with the hermeneutical approach prescribed by Scripture itself. He is certain that his exposition of the God of creation and providence has, in a word, more reliable Scriptural support. Indeed, it is fair to say that Calvin's main reason for introducing the doctrine of Scripture before the chapter on the Trinity in the 1559 *Institutes* is to provide the clear foundation upon which his own account of the doctrine of God the Creator may be distinguished from those who claim to be Scriptural monotheists like himself. That this reading of Calvin is accurate will be evident as we now examine his Trinitarian concern and its relationship to his account of the God of providence and divine providence itself. In the process of this examination it will become evident how crucial Calvin's doctrine of Scripture and its correlates are not only to his treatment of the Trinity but also to the Scriptural God-concept he is seeking to present in his account of divine providence.

I. CALVIN'S TRINITARIAN CONCERN RE-VISITED

The aim here is not to go over ground that has already been covered by standard discussions on the doctrine of the Trinity in Calvin's thought⁴ but

³ *Inst.* 1.13.2 (122).

⁴ See, for instance, B B Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity", in *Calvin and Augustine* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 189-284; T F Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Towards Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 21ff. and 41ff.; Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response*, especially pp. 22-53. For Calvin's relationship to the Anti-Trinitarian movement, see Williams, *Radical Reformation*, 3ff., 13ff., 198ff., 269ff., 319-337, 580-669; Roland F Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511-1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960); Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 1978); Antonio Rotondò, *Calvin and the Italian Anti-Trinitarians*, tr. J

to highlight some aspects of his Trinitarian concern which relate directly to the main focus of this study, namely, the God-concept employed by Calvin in his exposition of divine providence. It cannot be over-emphasised that the fundamental principle upon which Calvin sets out his doctrine of the Trinity is the authority of the Scriptural revelation of God.⁵

Say that in the one essence of God there is a trinity of persons; you will say in one word what Scripture states, and cut short empty talkativeness.⁶

Indeed, if we hold fast to what has been sufficiently shown above from Scripture – that the essence of the one God is simple and undivided, and that it belongs to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; and on the other hand that by a certain characteristic the Father differs from the Son, and the Son from the Spirit – the gate will be closed not only to Arius and Sabellius but to other ancient authors of errors.⁷

A careful reading of *Inst.* 1.13 will indicate that this dependence of Calvin upon the authority of Scripture for his exposition of the Trinity is, first of all, characterised by Calvin's commitment to the "reconceptualization of God required by the New Testament message of God's gracious salvation in Christ".⁸ As we shall see, it is this commitment

and A Tedeschi (St Louis: Foundation for Reformation Research, 1968).

⁵ *Inst.* 1.13.21 (146): "And let us not take it into it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word." See T F Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity", *Calvin Theological Journal* 25:2 (1990), 165-193, where he has cogently demonstrated the pervasive influence of Calvin's concern to derive his doctrine of the Trinity from the revelation of Scripture.

⁶ *Inst.* 1.13.5 (128).

⁷ *Inst.* 1.13.22 (147).

⁸ Butin, *Revelation, Redemption and Response*, 39. Cf. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 94: "To be more precise, the doctrine of the Trinity is a *Christian* doctrine because of the Biblical declaration that the Son, Word, or Wisdom of God is to be

which explains Calvin's concentration upon the New Testament testimony, rather than that of the Old Testament, to the doctrine of the Trinity on the one hand, and his insistence that it is the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament which alone holds water for him. This is not to say that Calvin does not see any evidence in the Old Testament for the doctrine of the Trinity.⁹ But whatever evidence there is becomes apparent only in the light of the New Testament testimony to the Trinity. Clearly then, Calvin is intent to show his commitment to give a "Christian" interpretation of the Scriptural data concerning God rather than, say, a Jewish interpretation.

Closely related to this commitment to the New Testament testimony to the doctrine of the Trinity is Calvin's support for the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine especially of the Nicene period. While Calvin did not ignore the error of Sabellianism,¹⁰ he reserved his most scathing criticisms for the anti-Nicene innovators. It is true that the radical 16th century figures and groups who opposed the orthodox Trinitarian doctrine were a complex matrix. But as Williams has observed, they can be accurately termed anti-Nicene because common to them all ultimately is their opposition to the Nicene formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹¹ Calvin's commitment to the Nicene formulation, it will be observed, was motivated by his recognition that it was nothing more nor less than the theological implication of the New Testament testimony concerning the one God.

This combined commitment to the New Testament testimony to the doctrine of the Trinity and the Nicene formulation is critical to an understanding of Calvin's Trinitarian concern. It explains Calvin's efforts to resist the scholastic tendency to concentrate trinitarian doctrine upon elaborate discussions about the essence of God on the one hand and the

identified with this particular man called Jesus of Nazareth."

⁹ See, for instance, *Inst.* 1.13.9-10, where Calvin demonstrates "The deity of Christ in the Old Testament".

¹⁰ See, for instance, *Inst.* 1.13.4 (125 and 127); 1.13.22 (147).

¹¹ Williams, *op cit*, 319f. Cf. Butin, *op cit*, 27: "...in Calvin's perception, some of the fundamental trinitarian concerns of the Nicene era were again at stake in his theological battles with Caroli and the radical anti-Nicenes."

biblicism of the anti-Nicene radicals on the other.¹² Butin has cogently shown that in response to the scholastic tendency to formulate its doctrine of the Trinity deductively – employing prior biblical, patristic, and philosophical propositions axiomatically according to established principles of logic, Calvin proposed a more inductive approach – starting with the data of New Testament exegesis and proceeding from what was revealed there about the Father, Son, and Spirit to certain biblical and extrabiblical generalizations about the unity of the three divine persons.¹³ There can be no doubt that it is Calvin's inductive exegetical method that led him to a marked reserve concerning certain ways of thinking about the Trinity in the Western tradition on the one hand, and to parallel emphases at crucial points with the Eastern tradition¹⁴ on the other. His appeal in *Inst.* 1.13.21 for caution, a reverent agnosticism and humility when dealing with the Trinity is undoubtedly directed towards this group and understandably so.

In response to the anti-Nicene biblicists who objected to both the terms, "Trinity" and "Person", in the Nicene formulation, Calvin was not averse to giving his wholehearted support to the latter. This is evident from Calvin's defence, right at the beginning of his account of the Trinity, of the admissibility of these two terms because they "aid the interpretation of Scripture" and "explain nothing else than what is attested and sealed by

¹² Butin, *op cit*, 40. Cf. Torrance, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Trinity", 168.

¹³ Butin, *op cit*, 26-49. His analysis and subsequent conclusion with respect to Calvin's Trinitarian concern is, to my mind, the most helpful and concise treatment to date.

¹⁴ Bray contends that Calvin found the key to a more deeply orthodox trinitarianism by insisting that each of the persons in the Trinity is *autotheos*, i.e., God in his own right. He goes on to add that by this assertion, Calvin not only attacked all forms of Origenism, but also the Sabellianism latent in the Western tradition. In his estimation, Calvin was attempting to synthesize Eastern and Western trinitarian models in a new and better framework. See Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 201. Cf. T F Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Gregory of Nazianzen and John Calvin", in *Calvin Studies V* (Davidson: Davidson College, 1990), 7-19, where he notes Calvin's modifications of the traditional Western position. Torrance has also demonstrated that a significant contribution of Calvin to the doctrine of the Trinity was the latter's adaptation of the concept of *in solidum* to express the mysterious Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity of God, that is to say something of how the three Persons relate to one God without losing their distinctiveness and interrelations as three. See his *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 201-202.

Scripture!"¹⁵ This stance of Calvin, with respect to the priority of Scripture over the Nicene formulation, is particularly crucial in an age for which antiquity holds a significant authority.¹⁶ As Lane has rightly observed,

While this was not formally necessary since the fathers can all err and Scripture alone is normative, it was practically and apologetically essential in that a theology contrary to the unanimous interpretation of the Christian church since apostolic times would seriously lack credibility. Furthermore, the Reformers were not Anabaptists who saw themselves as founding a new church. They believed that they were reforming the old church and they therefore stood in continuity with the church of the early fathers and even, to a lesser extent, with the church of the middle ages. This claim needed to be substantiated.¹⁷

This is clearly evident in Calvin's debate with Servetus, the most anti-Nicene radical. While he never felt free to disregard the testimony of the pre-Nicene fathers, Servetus did consider the fall of the Church dated specifically from the intrusion of Constantine into the Nicene formulation.¹⁸ It has been observed that Servetus relied heavily upon ante-Nicene or pre-Nicene patristic authors, especially Irenaeus and

¹⁵ *Inst.* 1.13.3 (123). It is worth noting that the amount of space Calvin devotes to this defence, i.e., *Inst.* 1.13.2-6, indicates the seriousness with which he treated the anti-Nicene biblicists' objection. Cf. *Inst.* 4.8.16 (1165): "But when it is often asserted in Scripture that there is one God, and further, when Christ is called so often the true and eternal God, one with the Father – what else are the Nicene fathers doing when they declare them of one essence but simply expounding the real meaning of Scripture?"

¹⁶ Calvin's stance, in this respect, is held consistently throughout the different editions of the *Institutes*. For example, Calvin's comments on this in the *Epistle Dedicatory* of the 1536 *Institutes*, pp. 8-11, is reproduced almost *ad verbatim* in the *Prefatory Address* of the 1559 *Institutes*, pp.18-23, except for the addition of two short paragraphs (on the Lord's Supper) in the latter.

¹⁷ Lane, "Calvin's Use of the Fathers and Medievals", 166.

¹⁸ Williams, *op cit*, 323. Cf. Friedman, *op cit*, 19: "In Servetus' case the fall came in 325 at the Council of Nicaea where the doctrine of the trinity was first formulated and when Christianity began its long track down the road of intellectual corruption."

Tertullian, in his attempt to recreate true Christianity.¹⁹ There can be no doubt that in dealing with his opponents' appeal to Irenaeus and Tertullian in *Inst.* 1.13.27-28, Calvin had Servetus particularly in mind. In response, Calvin demonstrated how Servetus had misused the ante-Nicene fathers by proving that they actually taught the same doctrine of the Trinity as the Nicene fathers!²⁰ In doing so, Calvin was showing that his own doctrine of the Trinity stood in express continuity not only with the precedent established by the Nicene formulation, but also with that of the earliest Church fathers.²¹ In a word, the doctrine of the Trinity has been part and parcel of historic Christianity.

The real burden of Calvin's opposition to Servetus arose from the fact that the latter appeared to the former to be teaching an odd mixture of two ancient heresies, namely, Sabellianism and Arianism.²² Since Calvin

¹⁹ Friedman, *op cit*, 19, and especially 103-112. Friedman attributes Servetus' attachment to them to the fact that the earliest Church fathers expressed the vaguest of trinitarian views without foregoing a systematic understanding of the nature of the Son and His redemptive purpose. As such, Servetus felt he found a strong ally in them for his own anti-trinitarian views. See, *ibid*, 104.

²⁰ For instance, *Inst.* 1.13.28 (155-156): "They pile up many passages from Irenaeus, where he declares the Father of Christ to be the sole and eternal God of Israel. This is either shameful ignorance or consummate depravity. For they ought to have considered that that saintly man was dealing and contending with fanatics who denied that the Father of Christ was that same God who had of old spoken through Moses and the prophets, but fancied a sort of specter produced from the corruption of the world. Therefore he is wholly concerned with this point: to make it plain that no other God is proclaimed in Scripture than the Father of Christ, and that it is wrong to imagine another." *Inst.* 1.13.29 (158): "And certainly anyone who diligently compares the writings of the ancients among themselves will find in Irenaeus nothing else than what his successors set forth."

²¹ This stance of Calvin with respect to the use of patristic sources has already been clearly spelt out in his *Prefatory Address to King Francis* of the 1559 *Institutes*, 18-23. To the charge that the Church fathers would have opposed the teaching of the Reformation, Calvin countered thus: "If the contest were to be determined by patristic authority, the tide of victory - to put it very modestly - would turn to our side. Now, these fathers have written many wise and excellent things. Still, what commonly happens to men has befallen them too, in some instances..." Referring to the opponents of the Reformation, he says that they "worship only the faults and errors of the fathers. The good things that these fathers have written they either do not notice, or misrepresent or pervert. You might say that their only care is to gather dung amid gold." See *Inst.* 1559, p 18.

²² Bray, *op cit*, 200. Cf. Butin, *op cit*, 33: "...it would be most accurate to say that Calvin regarded Servetus to be guilty of both the Arian and Sabellian heresies."

regarded these two heresies to be the most typical trinitarian deviations,²³ it should not be wondered that he should give so much space to Servetus' error in *Inst.* 1.13. Another aspect of the debate between Calvin and Servetus which should be highlighted, because it has not been given the attention it should have, is the possibility of the influence of Judaism and Islam upon Servetus. Bray has hinted at it.²⁴ Friedman, however, has shown conclusively that the influence was not merely conjectural but real.²⁵ It would seem obvious that Servetus wrote to convince other Christians to his view. But as Friedman has so cogently shown, Servetus' approach to Scripture and use of sources point towards an additional audience, viz., the Jews and Arabs. Relying upon Servetus' works, Friedman demonstrates that Servetus gives every indication that he was familiar with both Jewish and Islamic thought.²⁶ Not to be overlooked, however, is Friedman's observation that Servetus' rejection of the Nicene trinitarian formulation may have actually arisen from a genuine concern to convert Jews and Arabs to Christianity.²⁷ For, after all, Jews and Arabs alike could be brought into the fold of Christianity, were it not for the

²³ See especially *Inst.* 1.13.4 (125), 1.13.5 (127), and 1.13.22 (147) where Calvin's general designation of trinitarian heresies takes "Arius" and "Sabellius" as broad representatives.

²⁴ Bray, *op cit*, 200-201.

²⁵ It is unfortunate that Friedman's thesis has been largely ignored. For instance, Butin does not refer to him at all, nor Bray.

²⁶ Friedman shows from Servetus' *Errors and Restitution*, that Servetus cited such standard rabbinic authorities as Maimonides, Rashi and David Kimchi, sources so well known to Christian scholars as to constitute a legitimate branch of Christian exegesis and study. But Servetus also cited over a dozen other rabbinic sources including such Spanish authorities as Abraham Saba and Isaac Arama, virtually his contemporaries. Servetus also cited the teaching of the Koran. See Friedman, *op cit*, 17-18. It is, however, clear that in his debate with Calvin, it was the rabbinic sources (apart from the ante-Nicene fathers) that he depended upon. It cannot be ignored that as early as 1530-1531, Oecolampadius had warned that Servetus was attempting to "judaize" those passages of Scripture predicting the coming of Christ; and when facing execution for his views, one of the charges brought against him was "judaizing". For a thorough examination of Servetus' use of rabbinic sources, see Friedman, *ibid*, 121-132.

²⁷ Friedman, *ibid*, 17-18. Williams has similarly noted Servetus' "apocalyptic sense of the urgency of engaging in a massive but irenic mission to the Jews and Moslems..." See Williams, *op cit*, 3.

doctrine of the Trinity.²⁸ In that sense then Calvin could be responding to what he deemed was the terrible danger of not merely Servetus' rejection of the Nicene formulation but also Servetus' accommodation to the Jewish and Muslim concept of the unity of God (i.e., to unitarianism) in seeking to fulfill his desire to witness to them.

That Calvin was aware of such a danger has already been alluded to, for instance, in *The Secret Providence of God*. Calvin had accused Castellio of confounding the Christian God with that of the Muslim God.²⁹ While Calvin does not refer directly to the Muslim concept of God in *Inst.* 1.13 nor, for that matter, the Muslims themselves,³⁰ he nevertheless did give an indication in the 1559 *Institutes* as to what he thought of their theology in the following words:

²⁸ Friedman notes, *op cit*, 18-19: "As we will observe, over and again Servetus asked his orthodox Christian contemporaries '...what sort of reasoning should you rely upon in order that such Jews might be persuaded...?' Over and again Servetus answered his own question when he wrote: 'The Jews are supported by so many authorities that they naturally wonder at the great division of God...' Servetus was aware of the failure of Catholic baptism to convert the hearts and minds of marranos and others forcibly converted by Spanish authorities. And it is well known that the leading obstacle to Jewish acceptance of Christianity, at least intellectually, was the doctrine of the trinity... 'The Jews also shrink from adhering to this fancy of ours and laugh at our foolishness about the trinity.' Moreover, Servetus continued, 'The trinity was the very reason Jews rejected Christianity for on account of its blasphemies they do not believe this is the messiah who was promised in their law...' As we shall see, Servetus went a great distance to express his own views of the Godhead in Jewish rabbinic terms more likely to convert Jews than Christians."

"Similarly, Servetus was concerned about Spain's large Arab population and the unsuccessful attempts to bring them to Christ. Like the Jews, Arabs could be brought to Christianity were it not for the doctrine of the trinity. As early as the writing of the *Errors* Servetus noted that Mohammed '...says in his Koran that Christ was the greatest of prophets... He says, moreover, that the evangelists and apostles were the best of men and wrote what is true and did not hold to the trinity or three persons in the divine being but men in later times added this.' Later in the *Restitution* this same view was again presented: '...the trinity is openly rejected in the Koran, azoara 11, 12 and 28, where Mohammed teaches that three Gods or participants in God was unknown to the Fathers.'"

²⁹ See Chapter 2, page 35 of this study.

³⁰ Calvin, however, does refer to them elsewhere in the 1559 *Institutes*; see, for instance, his references to "Turks" in *Inst.* 2.6.4 (348), 3.4.21 (647), 3.13.5 (768), 4.2.10 (1051), 4.16.24 (1347).

So today the Turks, although they proclaim at the top of their lungs that the Creator of heaven and earth is God, still, while repudiating Christ, substitute an idol in the place of the true God.³¹

The context in which Calvin locates this citation is significant. He was arguing for the necessity of Christ as the Mediator between God and fallen man. In the process, he shows his aversion for the Jewish gloss over "what the prophets had taught concerning the Redeemer" and for the fanatics' "impious fantasy" that in Christ there was "only a portion of divinity". Thus, in one bold stroke, he categorises all three groups - Jews, fanatics and Turks - as one. For

...even if many men once boasted that they worshipped the Supreme Majesty, the Maker of heaven and earth, yet because they had no Mediator it was not possible for them truly to taste God's mercy, and thus be persuaded that he was their Father.³²

Clearly, then, what marks these groups out as one in intent and purpose and why Calvin objected to them is their rejection of not just the necessity of Christ as the Redeemer but also his deity. For in Calvin's thought, the mediatorial role of Christ is closely linked to Christ's deity.³³ It is this link which undergirds Calvin's opposition to the God-concept found among the Jews and Turks. He writes:

³¹ *Inst.* 2.6.4 (348).

³² *Inst.* 2.6.4 (347).

³³ *Comm.* on John 8:58, CC, 235: "Some think that it simply applies to Christ's eternal divinity, and compare it to that passage of Moses, 'I am that I am' (Exod 3:14). But I extend it much further, in that Christ's power and grace, inasmuch as He is the Redeemer of the world, were common to all ages. It therefore fits in with the saying of the apostle, 'Christ yesterday, and today, and for ever' (Heb 13:8). For the context seems to demand this interpretation. ...that the grace of the Mediator flourished in all ages depended on His eternal divinity. And this saying of Christ contains a remarkable statement of His divine essence." For a fuller discussion of the relationship between Christ's mediatorial role and his deity, see *Inst.* 2.12.1-3, where Calvin argues for the necessity that "the Mediator should be God and should become man".

Turks and Jews certainly adorn the god they worship with beautiful and fine titles. But we must hold that the name of God is nothing but an empty imagination when it is separated from Christ... For the Father has commanded Him to sit at His right hand, and therefore he who imagines God without Christ takes away the half of Him.³⁴

In that respect, the Papists were no different.³⁵ "For Turks and Jews and Papists believe, but without knowing or understanding anything."³⁶

This rejection by the Jews, Turks and Papists of both the mediatorial role of Christ and his deity, Calvin observed, arose from the more fundamental error of rejecting the testimony of the New Testament. Commenting on Acts 24:14, he remarked that the difference between himself and the Papists is this:

It is as if any one of us today replies to the Papists that he worships the God whom they profess, but in the way that we have been taught from the Law and the Gospel... Apart from that this verse contains the useful doctrine that the one and only foundation of correct and orthodox faith is to subject oneself to Scripture, and reverently embrace its teaching.³⁷

³⁴ *Comm.* on John 5:23, CC, 128. Cf. *Comm.* on John 11:4, CC, 2-3: "This expression *for the glory of God that the Son of man may be glorified*, is very important. From it we gather that God wants to be known in the person of His Son in such a way that whatever honour He demands for Himself may be paid to the Son. Therefore we find in chapter 5:23, 'He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father.' The Turks and Jews pretend to worship God, but their insolence against Christ means that they are trying to tear God from Himself."

³⁵ *Comm.* on Acts 24:14, CC, 251: "Therefore the Papists are ridiculous in thinking that any sort of antiquity has Paul's assent and approval. They say, 'We worship the God of the fathers along with Paul, as custom has been delivered to us from hand to hand.' As if, even with the Papists themselves as the judges in fact, it were enough for the Turks and the Jews to put forward the same shield against the faith of Christ."

³⁶ *Comm.* on John 6:69, CC, 179.

³⁷ *Comm.* on Acts 24:14, CC, 251-252.

For Calvin, the Scripture is defined by “the Law and the Gospel”, meaning, the Old Testament and New Testament respectively.³⁸ The “religion of the Pope and Mohammed” is fabricated from “the distorted additions by which they imagined they filled out the teaching of the Gospel”.³⁹ They both “have a common starting-point: that in the Gospel we are initiated into the true faith, but that the perfection of doctrine must be sought elsewhere to perfect us completely”.⁴⁰ The Papists boast with “professorial superciliousness that all their inventions are the oracles of the Spirit”.⁴¹ Mohammed asserts that “without his Koran men always remain as children”.⁴² Similarly, many “fanatics have tried a similar method of deception”, saying that the written teaching seems to them to be of the letter; therefore, “they were pleased to make up a new theology consisting of revelations”.⁴³ Thus, even though all these groups were dissimilar in many respects, Calvin notices that they were actually one in principle. As he puts it on one occasion:

Mohammed and the Pope have this religious principle in common, that Scripture does not contain the perfection of doctrine, but that something higher has been revealed by the Spirit. The Anabaptists and Libertines have in our own day drawn their madness from the same ditch. But the spirit which introduces any invention foreign to the Gospel is a deceiver and not of Christ; for Christ promises the

³⁸ It is significant that in his discussion of the Trinity, Calvin limits his Scriptural evidence for Christ’s deity to the Old Testament and the New Testament. Undoubtedly, these define the canon of Scripture for him. See the headings for *Inst.* 1.13.9 (131) and 1.13.11 (134).

³⁹ *Comm.* on John 4:25, CC, 102.

⁴⁰ *Comm.* on John 16:14, CC, 121.

⁴¹ *Comm.* on 1 John 4:6, CC, 128.

⁴² *Comm.* on John 16:14, CC, 121.

⁴³ *Comm.* on John 16:14, CC, 121.

Spirit who will confirm the teaching of the Gospel, as if He was signing it.⁴⁴

It is quite evident, therefore, that Calvin's trinitarian concern is not unrelated to the unitarianism of the Jewish religion and Islam of his day. This is not to say that there were no other related issues. But it cannot be ignored that Calvin's concern was in part influenced by this desire to distance the God of the Christian faith, viz., the One God in three Persons, from that of the Jewish religion and Islam. Given the fact that Calvin himself accused both Servetus and also Castellio (in *The Secret Providence of God*) of promoting the latter, this should not be at all surprising. While all three "faiths" are monotheistic in principle, what distinguishes the Christian faith is that it is trinitarian in character as well.

Thus, as has been suggested at the beginning of this chapter, Calvin's trinitarian concern must be seen against the backdrop of his treatment of idolatry and the doctrine of Scripture. It is reasonable to suppose that the location of his treatment on the Trinity in *Inst.* 1.13 is partly dictated by his concern to address not just dualism, pantheism, deism, atheism and polytheism but also a monotheism which does not embrace the Triune nature of God. Calvin traces this error to the fact that this form of monotheism does not accept the mediatorial work of Christ nor his deity. Servetus was not the only culprit in this respect. The Jews, Turks, Papists, Anabaptists and Libertines were guilty of the same.⁴⁵ It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in his treatment of the Trinity, it is Calvin's christological concern which is most prominent.⁴⁶ The reason is obvious. To deny the mediatorial work of Christ, in Calvin's thought, is to deny the deity of Christ. To deny the deity of Christ is to deny the doctrine of the Trinity. To deny the doctrine of the Trinity is to reject the testimony

⁴⁴ *Comm.* on John 14:25, CC, 88.

⁴⁵ As has been noted in Chapter 2, pages 36-38 of this study, Calvin's christological concern was already evident in his providence-related controversies with the Libertines.

⁴⁶ Calvin gives more space to demonstrating the deity of Christ (*Inst.* 1.13.7-13) than, say, the deity of the Holy Spirit (*Inst.* 1.13.14-15).

of not just historic Christianity but, most importantly, the testimony of Scripture. It cannot be overlooked as well that Calvin's christological concern is derived from a commitment to the testimony of the New Testament and the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament.

The next two sections will examine the validity of the above reading of Calvin as it applies to a particular aspect of his discussion of the Trinity in *Inst.* 1.13, namely, the process by which Calvin integrated divine providence into that discussion.

II. PROVIDENCE WITHIN A TRINITARIAN RUBRIC

In *Inst.* 1.13, Calvin proves the eternal deity of Christ and the Spirit from various considerations.⁴⁷ That their involvement in creation and providence forms one of these is unequivocal. As early as *Inst.* 1.5, Calvin has already hinted at God sustaining "this infinite mass of heaven and earth by his Word".⁴⁸ In *Inst.* 1.13, however, this allusion to the Word's involvement in creation and providence not merely as an intermediary⁴⁹ but as God in his own right is maintained consistently.⁵⁰ The same is said of the Spirit.⁵¹ This is further affirmed by Calvin in his treatment of creation in *Inst.* 1.14.⁵²

⁴⁷ For example, the deity of Christ is demonstrated by the distinction given to "the Word" (Christ) when used alongside God in Scripture, 1.13.7-8; the ascription of deity to Christ in the Old Testament, 1.13.9; the witness of the apostles and their testimony to Christ's works and miracles, 1.13.11-13.

⁴⁸ *Inst.* 1.5.6 (59).

⁴⁹ *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129): "Moses clearly teaches this in the creation of the universe, setting forth this Word as intermediary".

⁵⁰ *Inst.* 1.13.7-8 and 1.13.12 are given over solely to proving this.

⁵¹ *Inst.* 1.13.14 (138) and 1.13.15 (140) especially.

⁵² *Inst.* 1.14.2 (162): "If anyone should more attentively ponder what I only briefly touch upon, it will be clear that Moses was a sure witness and herald of the one God, the Creator. I pass over what I have already explained [no doubt referring here to *Inst.* 1.13.22-24], that he there not only speaks of the bare essence of God, but also sets forth for us His eternal Wisdom and Spirit; that we may not conjure up some other god than him who would have himself recognised in that clear image." *Inst.* 1.14.20 (179-180): "Therefore, that we may apprehend with true faith what it profits us to know God, it

While Calvin's approach in demonstrating the deity of Christ and that of the Spirit through their involvement in creation and providence differs somewhat,⁵³ it will be obvious to the careful reader that in both cases, he relies not only upon the New Testament testimony but also upon the New Testament to throw light on the Old Testament. For instance, when proving the deity of the Spirit from the fact that upon him is conferred "functions that especially belong to the divinity" Calvin relied heavily upon the testimony of Paul.⁵⁴ Similarly, when showing that Scripture assigns the term "God" to the Spirit, Calvin again relied overwhelmingly on the New Testament. We know that the Spirit is God since the apostle Paul used the term "God" and "Spirit" interchangeably.⁵⁵ Furthermore, whatever was attributed to God alone in the Old Testament, the New Testament attributes to the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ Indeed, he argued from

is important for us to grasp first the history of the creation of the universe, as it has been set forth briefly by Moses [Gen, chs. 1 and 2], and then has been more fully illustrated by saintly men, especially by Basil and Ambrose. From this history we shall learn that God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing; that thereupon he brought forth living beings and inanimate things of every kind, that in a wonderful series he distinguished an innumerable variety of things, that he endowed each kind with its own nature, assigned functions, appointed places and stations; and that, although all were subject to corruption, he nevertheless provided for the preservation of each species until the Last Day."

⁵³ Calvin gives more space to the Old Testament testimony to Christ's deity in this respect (see *Inst.* 1.13.9-10). In the case of proving the Spirit's deity from his involvement in creation and providence, Calvin only used one Old Testament text, namely, Gen 1.2, see *Inst.* 1.13.14 (138). This cautious approach may be due in part to what he deems as the early church fathers' faulty hermeneutic with respect to the Old Testament testimony and he cites an example of this sort of faulty hermeneutic in *Inst.* 1.14.15 (140).

⁵⁴ See *Inst.* 1.13.14, where Calvin only used one Old Testament text, viz., Exodus 4:11, while the remaining nine texts cited in the second paragraph of this section were from the New Testament. "Paul," Calvin says, "very clearly attributes to the Spirit divine power, and shows that he resides hypostatically in God."

⁵⁵ *Inst.* 1.13.15 (139): "And the apostle himself sometimes writes that 'we are God's temple' [1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16], at other times, in the same sense, 'the temple of the Holy Spirit' [1 Cor 6:19]."

⁵⁶ An instance of this is *Inst.* 1.13.14 (139) where Calvin notes that the bestowal of wisdom and speech, according to Moses, is God's work alone (Exod 4:11); and yet this was ascribed to the Spirit by Paul (1 Cor 12:10). Calvin offered two other examples in *Inst.* 1.13.15 (139-140): "And where Isaiah introduces the Lord of Hosts speaking, Paul teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who speaks [Isa 6:9; Acts 28:25-26]. Indeed, where the prophets usually say that the words they utter are those of the Lord of Hosts, Christ and the apostles refer them to the Holy Spirit [cf. 2 Peter 1:21]."

the Son's deity to the Spirit's deity,⁵⁷ thus indicating the priority of his christological emphasis. In that sense, when Calvin draws the conclusion that the Spirit must be God in the Old Testament, it is in the light of the New Testament testimony that the Spirit, like the Son, is designated "God".

This approach of Calvin is even more pronounced in his discussion of Christ's deity. While admittedly Moses set forth the Word as the intermediary in his account of creation, it is significant that Calvin does not try to prove the deity of Christ from the plural name of God, *Elohim*, found in Genesis 1:1.⁵⁸ The reason is simple: those who have used it against the Arians did not realise that it can lend itself to the equal error of Sabellianism.⁵⁹ Thus Calvin purposely omits specific reference to Genesis 1:1, preferring rather to make a general statement based upon Genesis, chapter 1, that wherever God is mentioned in the act of creation ("Let this or that be done"), he did so through his Word, viz., Christ.⁶⁰ He has no hesitation, however, in using Genesis 1:3 to prove the eternal deity of Christ. Using the priority of the Word before the creation of light and arguing from cause to effect, Calvin says that since the Word ("God said") preceded the creation of light, he must have existed within the Godhead before creation itself.⁶¹ What is significant is that Calvin cites John 17:5

⁵⁷ *Inst.* 1.13.15 (140): "Finally, if blasphemy against the Spirit is remitted neither in this age nor in the age to come, although he who has blasphemed against the Son may obtain pardon..., by this his divine majesty, to injure or diminish which is an inexpressible crime, is openly declared." This citation could be easily misunderstood if not for the fact that Calvin had already proven the deity of the Son in the preceding sections. Similarly, *Inst.* 1.13.14 (139): "In short, upon him, as upon the Son, are conferred functions that especially belong to divinity."

⁵⁸ Calvin cautions against this in his *Comm.* on Gen 1:1, *CTS*, 70-71, preferring rather to understand the plural number as expressing "those powers which God exercised in creating the world."

⁵⁹ *Comm.* on Gen 1:1, *CTS*, 71.

⁶⁰ *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129).

⁶¹ *Inst.* 1.13.8 (131). Cf. *Comm.* on Gen 1:3, *CTS*, 74-75, where Calvin uses the same argument against Servetus who insisted, upon Gen 1:3, that the creation of light was prior to the beginning of the Word. Calvin uses the same argument against Servetus with respect to the deity of the Spirit, *Inst.* 1.13.22 (148): "Moreover, although no mention is made of the Spirit except in the history of the creation of the universe,

and John 1:1-3 in support of his christological interpretation of Genesis 1:3.⁶² Similarly, when proving the deity of the Word, he appeals to the apostles who, being “better interpreters”, taught (in Heb 1:2-3) that the world was made through the Son, and that he upholds all things by his powerful word.⁶³ Citing Christ’s words in John 5:17, “My Father and I have worked even to this day”, Calvin noted that in affirming that “he was constantly at work with the Father from the very beginning of the world, Christ explains more explicitly what Moses had briefly touched upon”. It is, however, the apostle John who “spoke most clearly of all when he declared that that Word, God from the beginning with God, was at the same time the cause of all things, together with God the Father [John 1:1-3]”.⁶⁴ It should be noted that Heb 1:2-3 and John 5:17, form an important part of Calvin’s argument for the deity of Christ as he employs them within the same context on three occasions. On each occasion it is to demonstrate the eternal deity of Christ from his involvement in both creation and providence.⁶⁵ Not to be overlooked is Calvin’s employment of Col 1:15-18 to the same effect: the author of all the good gifts the Colossians enjoyed should not be attributed to the angels but to Christ.⁶⁶ When opposing Osiander, he similarly argued on the basis of Col 1:14-18 that as “the

nevertheless the Spirit is introduced here, not as a shadow, but as the essential power of God, when Moses tells that the as yet formless mass was itself sustained in him [Gen 1:2]. Therefore it then has become clear that the eternal Spirit had always been in God, while with tender care he supported the confused matter of heaven and earth, until beauty and order were added.”

⁶² *Inst.* 1.13.8 (130-131); cf. *Comm.* on Gen 1:3, *CTS*, 74, where Calvin cites John 1:3 in support of this interpretation.

⁶³ *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129). Similarly, *Inst.* 1.13:12 (136): “And verily, to govern the universe with providence and power, and to regulate all things by the command of his own power [Heb 1:3], deeds that the apostle ascribes to Christ, is the function of the Creator alone.” Likewise, *Inst.* 1.16.4 (203): “At this point we may refer to Christ’s statement that from the very beginning he and the Father were always at work [John 5:17]; and to Paul’s teaching that ‘in him we live, move, and have our being’ [Acts 17:28]; also, what the author of The Letter to the Hebrews says, meaning to prove the divinity of Christ, that all things are sustained by his mighty command [Heb 1:3].”

⁶⁴ *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129). Cf. *Inst.* 1.13.12 (136); 1.16.4 (203); 2.14.2 (483).

⁶⁵ *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129-130); 1.13.12 (136); 1.16.4 (203).

⁶⁶ *Inst.* 1.14.10 (170).

angels enjoyed [Christ's] headship, why could Christ not ruled over men also by his divine power, quicken and nourish them like his own body by the secret power of his Spirit...?"⁶⁷ It would appear, from Calvin's employment of John 5:17, Col 1:14-18 and Heb 1:1-3, that these form a *catena* of texts upon which he relied for his argument of the deity of Christ as seen in His involvement both in creation and providence.⁶⁸

It is thus evident that Calvin gives priority to the New Testament testimony of the deity of Christ and the Spirit, and that for him the concept of God found in the Old Testament must be viewed from the christological perspective provided by the New Testament. It is also clear, by implication, that Calvin intended to provide both a christological and, therefore, trinitarian emphasis to his doctrine of creation and providence. The fact that he consistently employs the involvement of Christ and the Spirit in creation and providence as a proof of their deity is evidence of this. But as the next section will indicate, this commitment of Calvin to the priority of the New Testament and, therefore, to its christological emphasis, has other implications especially for his doctrine of providence.

III. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL EMPHASIS AND PROVIDENCE

In Puckett's treatment of Calvin's exegesis of the Old Testament, he has ventured the suggestion that Calvin's main criticism of Jewish exegesis is that it fails to see the plain Christological import of the Old Testament.⁶⁹ The foregoing discussion has confirmed that observation to some extent as there can be no doubt that in his treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, Calvin consistently reverts to the New Testament testimony of Christ as the authoritative guide to the concept of God found in the Old

⁶⁷ *Inst.* 2.12.7 (473).

⁶⁸ Apart from *Inst.* 1.13.7 (129-130), 1.13.12 (136), 1.16.4 (203), where Calvin employs John 5:17 and Heb 1:1-3 together for this purpose, note *Inst.* 2.14.2, where Calvin cites John 5:17, John 17:5 and Col 1:15, 17 to support his proof of Christ's divinity. See also *Comm.* on John 5:17, CC, 123; *Comm.* on Heb 1-3, CC, 6-9.

⁶⁹ David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 82ff.

Testament. Nowhere is this more evident than in Calvin's discussion of the deity of Christ in the Old Testament and, especially in his understanding of the Angel of Yahweh motif.

There can be no doubt that Calvin accepts unreservedly that the Angel of Yahweh in the Old Testament is none other than the second Person of the Trinity.⁷⁰ In doing so, he believes, he has the support of the early Church.⁷¹ However, though Calvin agrees with the conclusion arrived at by the early Church that does not mean he arrived at the same conclusion by the same route.

In a recent study, Juncker has shown that the early Church relied heavily upon the Septuagint version of the translation of Isaiah 9:6 for their application of the appellation to Christ.⁷² This is evident from their unreserved acceptance of the name, "the Angel of great counsel", found in the Septuagint, as a valid translation of "Wonderful Counsellor" in the Hebrew text.⁷³ For example, in his dialogue with the Jew Trypho, Justin Martyr took as his primary source the messianic nature of Isaiah 9:6 and,

⁷⁰ See especially *Inst.* 1.13.10 (132-134). Also, *Comm.* on Exod 14:19, CTS, 248: "He, who has been called 'Jehovah' hitherto, is now designated by Moses 'the Angel'; not only because the angels who represent God often borrow His name, but because this leader of the people was God's only begotten Son, who afterwards was manifested in the flesh.." Cf. *Comm.* on Josh 5:13, CTS, 13: "Accordingly, he is indiscriminately called an angel, and distinguished by the title of eternal God. Of this fact Paul is a competent witness, who distinctly declared that it was Christ." Cf. *Inst.* 1.14.9 (170): "And Christ himself, because of the primacy that he holds in the person of the Mediator, is called an angel [Mal 3:1]."

⁷¹ *Inst.* 1.13.10 (133): "But the orthodox doctors of the church have rightly and prudently interpreted that chief angel to be God's Word, who already at that time, as a sort of foretaste, began to fulfill the office of Mediator. For even though he was not yet clothed with flesh, he came down, so to speak, as an intermediary, in order to approach believers more intimately. Therefore this closer intercourse gave him the name of angel."

⁷² Günther Juncker, "Christ as Angel: The Reclamation of a Primitive Title" in *Trinity Journal* 15NS (1994): 221-250.

⁷³ See, for instance, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament* with an English translation by Sir Launcelot Lee Brenton, and with Various Readings, Critical Notes and Appendices (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons), which translates Isa 9:6 thus: "For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder: and his name is called the Messenger of great counsel: for I will bring peace upon the princes, and health to him."

therefore, the validity of the "Angel of great counsel" as a messianic title.⁷⁴ He does not attempt to prove or justify it probably because both he and Trypho have assumed from the outset that Isa 9:6 was messianic and that "Angel" was an acceptable messianic title.⁷⁵ Based upon the similarity of both title and function between Christ and "the Angel", he argued that Christ must be "the Angel" who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 15-22, to Jacob in Genesis 28-35 and to Moses in Exodus 3.⁷⁶ The Old Testament theophanies were without exception "Christophanies" because "they were all appearances of the Angel of the Lord who was known from Isa 9:6 to be Christ".⁷⁷ From this Justin goes on to affirm that this Angel, who is Christ, is fully God⁷⁸ though distinct from the Father.⁷⁹ Later Church fathers continued to assume the messianic nature of Isa 9:6 and thus the validity of the "Angel of great counsel" as a messianic title.⁸⁰

Kelly has suggested that with Augustine this early patristic tradition of associating "the Angel" with the pre-incarnate Christ went through a shift.⁸¹ While it is true that Augustine does not regard all theophanies as

⁷⁴ Kelly has observed that Justin had used the appearances of God in the Old Testament as one of three proofs of the distinct personality of the Word, and that he had developed these proofs particularly against monotheism. See J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: A & C Clark, 1958), 96-97.

⁷⁵ Juncker notes that not only did the Septuagint translators themselves viewed Isa 9:6 as messianic; so did the Hymns of Qumran and the Targum. See, Juncker, *ibid*, 226.

⁷⁶ *Dialogue* 55-56, 58-59, ANF 1:222-227.

⁷⁷ Juncker, *ibid*, 234.

⁷⁸ *Dialogue* 128, ANF 1:264: "And Christ being Lord, and God the Son of God, and appearing formerly in power as Man, and Angel, and in the glory of the fire as at the bush...." Cf. *Dialogue* 61, ANF 1:227-228; *Apology* 1, 58, ANF 1:184.

⁷⁹ See especially *Dialogue* 62, ANF 1:228, where Justin argues from Gen 1:26, 28 and 3:22, that there must necessarily be at least two persons in the Godhead.

⁸⁰ For Irenaeus' use of Isa 9:6, see, for instance, *Against Heresies* 3.16.3, 3.19.2, 4.33.11, ANF 1:441, 449, 509. For Tertullian's use of the same, see, for instance *On the Flesh of Christ* 14, ANF 3:533-534, *Against Praxeas* 16, ANF 3:611-612, *On Prescription Against Heretics* 13, ANF 3:249. For Athanasius' use, see, for instance, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.25.12, NPNF 4:400; 3.30.63, NPNF 4:428; *On Luke 10:22 (Matt 11:27)* 5, NPNF 4:89.

⁸¹ Kelly, *op cit*, 273: "In illustration of [the unity of God] Augustine argues [see his *De Trin.* 2, 12-34; cf. 3, 4-27) that the theophanies recorded in the Old Testament should not be regarded, as the earlier patristic tradition had tended to regard them, as

exclusively "Christophanies", it cannot be doubted that he viewed "the Angel of the Lord" to be none other than the pre-incarnate Christ.⁸² Thus like the fathers before him, Augustine equates the pre-incarnate Christ with the Angel of the Lord. Like them, too, he relies heavily upon the LXX for the messianic import of Isa 9:6.

Calvin, however, is more cautious. For example, he does not even mention the LXX translation, when he cites Isa 9:6 in *Inst.* 1.13.9. Rather, he takes to task the interpretation given to this text by the Jews, an interpretation he completely disagrees with.⁸³ In his *Commentary*, Calvin elaborates his objections to the Jewish interpretation as follow:

The Jews impudently torture this passage, for they interpret it as relating to Hezekiah, though he had been born before this prediction was uttered. But he speaks of it as something new and unexpected; and it is even a promise, intended to arouse believers to the expectation of a future event; and therefore there can be no hesitation in concluding that he describes a *child* that was afterwards to be *born*.⁸⁴

appearances exclusively of the Son. Sometimes they can be attributed to the Son or to the Spirit, sometimes to the Father, and sometimes to all Three; on occasion it is impossible to decide to which of the Three to ascribe them."

⁸² Commenting on the appellation in Exodus 3:1-6, *On the Trinity* 2.15.13, *NPNF* 3:48, Augustine noted: "He is here also first called the Angel of the Lord, and then God. Was an angel, then, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? Therefore He may be rightly understood to be the Saviour Himself, of whom the apostle says, "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." Similarly, in *On the Psalms*, *NPNF* 8:75: "Whom called He here the Angel of the Lord, who shall send round about them that fear Him, and shall deliver them? Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is called in prophecy, the Angel of the great Counsel, the Messenger of the great Counsel; so the Prophets called Him."

⁸³ *Inst.* 1.13.9 (131-132): "But if their stubbornness does not yield, quite evidently Christ is brought forward by Isaiah both as God and as adorned with the highest power, which is the characteristic mark of the one God. 'This is,' he says, 'the name by which they call him, Mighty God, Father of the coming age,' etc. [Isa 9:6p.] The Jews also rail here, and thus invert the reading, 'This is the name by which the Mighty God, Father of the coming age, shall call him,' etc., leaving to the Son only the title, 'Prince of Peace'. But to what purpose would so many titles be heaped up in this place to God the Father, since the intention of the prophet is to adorn Christ with clear marks to build up our faith in Him?"

⁸⁴ *Comm.* on Isa 9:6, *CTS*, 307.

And his name shall be called... The Jews apply it to God, and read it continuously; *he shall call his name Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*⁸⁵ But it is very evident that this proceeds from a desire, or rather from a licentious eagerness, to obscure the glory of Christ; for if they had not laboured with excessive keenness to rob him of his Godhead, the passage would run on very smoothly as interpreted by our divines. Besides, what necessity was there for ascribing to God those attributes, if the Prophet meant nothing more than that God gave a name to Messiah? Again, it would have been an interruption of the regular order to insert the name of God in the midst of various titles, but it ought to have run thus, the mighty God, Wonderful, Counsellor, shall call. Now, I do not see how the name ...(yognetz) can be applied absolutely to God, for it belongs to counsellors who attend kings or other persons. If any obstinate wrangler shall contend for the notion of the Rabbins, he will show nothing but his own impudence. Let us follow the plain and natural meaning.⁸⁶

This is not to say that Calvin entirely disagreed with the LXX rendering of Isa 9:6 which was readily adopted by the early Church fathers. Occasionally he used the LXX rendering without hesitation.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Young points out that the Targum rendering of this verse ("And there was called His name from of old, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, He who lives for ever, the Messiah, in whose days peace shall increase upon us") closely parallels and supports the Masoretic text. As such, Jewish commentators have tended to produce their own renderings based more upon the Targum. For example, Kimchi renders it, "The God, who is called and who is Wonder, Counsellor, the mighty God, the eternal Father, calls his name the Prince of Peace." See E J Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 332.

⁸⁶ *Comm.* on Isa 9:6, CTS, 309. Young notes that Calvin was one of the first to point out the objection to the construction rendered by Jewish commentators. See, Young, *ibid*, 332.

⁸⁷ See *Inst.* 2.15.1 (495) and *Inst.* 3.20.48 (916) where Calvin employs "the messenger or angel of great counsel" as a suitable rendering of "wonderful counsellor". It should be noted, however, that in both instances, Calvin insists upon conflating Isa 9:6 with Isa 28:29 and Jer 32:19. It would seem Calvin's intention in doing so is to demonstrate that the appellations, "Wonderful" and "Counsellor" are ascribed to God in the two latter

However, the fact remains that in his treatment of the Trinity in *Inst.* 1.13 and in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, Calvin was reluctant to depend upon the LXX rendering. Could it be that Calvin felt by citing the LXX rendering and, thereby, employing the method of the early church fathers, he would be seen to be accommodating himself to Jewish interpretation since the LXX was a Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek and not a “Christian” document as such? If so, then, Calvin is indicating implicitly his own acceptance of the authority of the New Testament and, therefore, the “Christian” interpretation of the Angel of Yahweh over and against the Jewish interpretation.

That this is indeed the case is evident from Calvin’s employment of 1 Cor 10:4, 9, as the basis for transferring the title of the “Angel of Yahweh” to Christ. This is hinted at in *Inst.* 1.13.10, where Calvin, in contending against the Jewish interpretation (and that of Servetus⁸⁸ as well) of the Angel of Yahweh, only appeals to one New Testament text, namely, 1 Cor 10:4.⁸⁹ That this is a key text for Calvin in this respect is confirmed elsewhere in the 1559 *Institutes*.⁹⁰ This becomes clearer as

texts and, therefore, if applied to Christ in Isa 9:6, should be an indication of Christ’s deity. Calvin, however, makes no direct reference to this fact in his comments on Isa 28:29 and Jer 32:19. See *Comm.* on Isa 28:29, CTS, 305-306, and *Comm.* on Jer 32:19, CTS, 174-176 respectively.

⁸⁸ *Inst.* 1.13.10 (133): “The impiety of Servetus was even more detestable, when he asserted that God was never revealed to Abraham and the other patriarchs, but that in his place an angel was worshipped... Again, Servetus yelps that God took on the person of an angel.”

⁸⁹ *Inst.* 1.13.10 (133-134): “Hence, also, that saying of Paul’s that Christ was the leader of the people in the wilderness [1 Cor 10:4]; because even though the time of humbling had not yet arrived, that eternal Word nevertheless set forth a figure of the office to which he had been destined.”

⁹⁰ *Inst.* 2.9.1 (424): “That only-begotten Son, who today is for us ‘the splendour of the glory of God the Father and the very stamp of his nature’ [Heb 1:3p.], became known of old to the Jews. In another place we have quoted Paul’s view that Christ was the leader of the former deliverance [cf. 1 Cor 10:4].” *Inst.* 2.10.5 (432): “In recounting examples of the punishments with which, according to the Scripture, the Israelites were chastised of old, his purpose was to deter the Corinthians from falling into similar misdeeds... For Paul here means to disabuse Christians of thinking they are superior to the Jews through the privilege of baptism. Nor is what immediately follows subject to this cavil: ‘They ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink’ [1 Cor 10:3-4]. This he interprets as referring to Christ.” *Inst.* 4.17.21 (1386): “Accordingly, as the apostle teaches that the rock from which spiritual drink sprang forth for the Israelites was Christ [1 Cor 10:4]...”

one turns to his commentaries. Who, he asks, is the angel who appeared to Moses at the bush?

Now, although this is an allowable manner of speaking, because the angels transfer to themselves the person and titles of God, when they are performing the commissions entrusted to them by him; and although it is plain from many passages, and especially from the first chapter of Zechariah,⁹¹ that there is one head and chief of the angels who commands the others, the ancient teachers of the Church have rightly understood that the Eternal Son of God is so called in respect to his office as Mediator, which he figuratively bore from the beginning, although he really took it upon him only at his incarnation. *And Paul sufficiently expounds this mystery to us, when he plainly asserts that Christ was the leader of his people in the Desert. (1 Cor. x. 4)* Therefore, although at that time, properly speaking, he was not yet the messenger of his Father, still his predestinated appointment to the office even then had this effect, that he manifested himself to the patriarchs, and was known in this character. Nor, indeed, had the saints ever any communication with God except through the promised Mediator. It is not then to be wondered at, if the Eternal Word of God, of one Godhead and essence with the Father, assumed the name of “the Angel” on the ground of his future mission.⁹²

Calvin’s dependence upon the New Testament is evident from the fact that, for him, the difficulty of the identity of the Angel of Yahweh is solved by Paul’s assertion in 1 Cor 10:4 that it is Christ. While Calvin does not touch directly upon the identification of the “rock” mentioned by Paul in

⁹¹ See his *Comm.* on Zech 1:8, CTS, 31-33, where Calvin regards the angel to be Christ which, he says, “is consistent with the common usage of Scripture; for Christ, we know, being the head of angels, ever exercises such dominion over them, that in obeying God they do nothing but under his authority.”

⁹² *Comm.* on Exod 3:2, CTS, 60-62. [Italics for emphasis, mine.]

1 Cor 10:4, it would seem probable that like the early Church fathers⁹³ before him, he takes Paul's statement at face value and assumes that the rock is Christ.⁹⁴ Since, for Calvin, Christ is also the Angel of Yahweh who led the people of Israel in the Old Testament, therefore, the "rock" which was "Christ" in 1 Cor 10:4 must have direct reference to the Angel of Yahweh, even though the appellation is not employed by Paul in the verse.⁹⁵ However that might be, it cannot be doubted that it is Paul's

⁹³ See, for instance, Irenaeus, *Fragments* 52, ANF 1:576: "The sacred books acknowledge with regard to Christ, that as He is the Son of man, so is the same Being not a [mere] man; and as He is flesh, so is He also spirit, and the Word of God, and God. And as He was born of Mary in the last times, so did He also proceed from God as the First-begotten of every creature; and as He hungered, so did He satisfy [others]; and as He thirsted, so did He of old cause the Jews to drink, for the 'Rock was Christ' Himself: thus does Jesus now give to His believing people power to drink spiritual waters, which spring up to life eternal." Also, Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.7, ANF 3:444: "For behold Marcion, in his blindness, stumbled at the rock whereof our fathers drank in the wilderness. For since 'that rock was Christ,' it was, of course, the Creator's, to whom also belonged the people." Also, Augustine, *Reply to Faustus* 12:29, NPNF 4:192: "Of the departure of Israel from Egypt, let us hear what the apostle himself says: 'I would not, brethren...' The explanation of one thing is a key to the rest. For if the rock is Christ from its stability, is not the manna Christ, the living bread which came down from heaven, which gives spiritual life to those who truly feed on it? The Israelites died because they received the figure only in its carnal sense. The apostle, by calling it spiritual food, shows its reference to Christ, as the spiritual drink is explained by the words, 'That rock was Christ,' which explain the whole."; cf. *On the Gospel of John* 26.12, NPNF 7:172: "'They drank,' saith he 'of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.' Thence the bread, thence the drink. The rock was Christ in sign; the real Christ is in the Word and in flesh."

⁹⁴ *Inst.* 2.10.5 (432); 4.14.26 (1302); 4.17.21 (1386).

⁹⁵ This link between Christ as the "rock" and the "Angel of Yahweh" maintained by Calvin is still maintained by modern scholars today. See, for example, Walter C Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 116: "The apostle's background for equating Christ with the Rock may be found in the OT's constant reference to the Angel of the Lord, who accompanied Israel in the wilderness (Ex 13:21; 14:19, 30; 15:26; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2, 14-15; Acts 7:30, 38). God said of this angel that went with Israel in Exodus 23:20: 'My name is in him.' This can only be a claim for the full deity of that angel that was sent from God to accompany Israel!" Also, F F Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 91: "Because in the Pentateuchal narrative Moses fetches water from the rock of Meribah both at the beginning (Exod 17:1-7) and towards the end (Num 20:2-13) of the wilderness wanderings, Jewish legend (cf. Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* x.7; Tosefta *Sukkah* iii.11f.) conceived the idea of a rock which travelled alongside the people throughout their forty years' journey and supplied them with water as they required it. Paul does not endorse this material fancy, but affirms that Christ accompanied his people as a spiritual source of refreshment throughout this period. This interpretation was facilitated by the use of the title 'The Rock' for Yahweh (in the Hebrew text but not in the LXX) in the Song of Moses (Dt 32.4, 15, 18, 30, 31) and elsewhere (e.g. Ps 18.2, 31; 19.14; 28.1; 62.2; 78.35; 89.26; 144.1; Isa 26.4), and by the identification of Christ before his incarnation with the angel of Yahweh's presence who accompanied Israel in the

statements in 1 Cor 10:4, 9 which form the basis for his identifying the Angel of Yahweh as the pre-incarnate Christ.⁹⁶ To those who claim that the "angel" mentioned in Numbers 20:16 was Moses, he said that "their notion is a poor one", for Paul in 1 Cor 10:4 "teaches that he was Christ".⁹⁷ Similarly, Calvin disagrees with those who think that the term, "mediator", is applied by Paul to Moses. He adds, "I agree rather with the ancient expositors, who apply it to Christ."⁹⁸ Why Christ?

Hence Peter says that the holy prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ (Acts 2.25) and Paul makes Him the Leader of the people in the wilderness (1 Cor 10.4). And certainly the Angel who appeared to Moses can be regarded as none other, for He claims to Himself the peculiar and essential name of God, which is never given to creatures.⁹⁹

Of the angel designated the captain of the Lord's host who appeared to Joshua in a vision, Calvin asserts that it must have been Christ. "Of this fact," he writes, "Paul is a competent witness, who distinctly declares that it was Christ (1 Cor x. 4)."¹⁰⁰ Commenting on Stephen's speech in Acts 7, Calvin noted that the angel who appeared to Moses not only claimed to be the eternal God; he is said by Luke to be "the same angel by whose

wilderness (Exod 14.19; 23.2ff.; 32.34; 33.2, 14ff.; cf. Ac 7.30, 38), if not indeed with 'the Lord' (LXX *kyrios*) who went before his people, rescued them from their enemies and healed them in the wilderness (Exod 13.21; 14.30; 15.26)."

⁹⁶ See, for instance, *Comm.* on Gen 48:16, CTS, 429: "Wherefore it is necessary that Christ should be here meant, who does not bear in vain the title of Angel, because he had become the perpetual Mediator. And Paul testifies that he was the Leader and Guide of the journey of his ancient people. (1 Cor. x. 4)." *Comm.* on Exod 14:19, CTS, 248-249: "He, who has been called 'Jehovah' hitherto, is now designated by Moses 'the Angel'; not only because the angels who represent God often borrow His name, but because this Leader of the people was God's only begotten Son, who afterwards was manifested in the flesh, as I have shewn upon the authority of Paul. (1 Cor. x. 4)."

⁹⁷ *Comm.* on Num 20:16, CTS, 142.

⁹⁸ *Comm.* on Gal 3:20, CC, 62.

⁹⁹ *Comm.* on Gal 3:20, CC, 62.

¹⁰⁰ *Comm.* on Josh 5:13, CTS, 87.

auspices and leading Moses liberated the people, and Paul asserts in 1 Cor 10:4 that Christ was that very guide, there is no cause now for us to wonder that the angel takes to himself what belongs to God alone."¹⁰¹ Elsewhere, he maintains that on this matter "the authority of Paul should be sufficient for us, when he admonishes the Corinthians not to tempt Christ as their fathers tempted Him in the desert (1 Cor. x. 9)."¹⁰²

It is clear then that for Calvin it is the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament which is decisive. If he applied the appellation, "the Angel of Yahweh", to the pre-incarnate Christ, it was only because Paul had done so before him. This hermeneutical approach of Calvin is not only significant, as we have noted above, for his doctrine of the Trinity. It is also significant for the christological emphasis in his doctrine of divine providence. In identifying the pre-incarnate Christ as the Angel of Yahweh, he is indicating that even before his incarnation,¹⁰³ Christ was

¹⁰¹ *Comm.* on Acts 7:30, CC, 190. Cf. *Comm.* on 1 Cor. 10:9, CC, 209-210: "Again, the angel who first appeared to Moses and then was always with the people on their journey is often called Jahweh... We should conclude, then, that that angel was the Son of God, and that even then He was already Guide of the Church, of which He was the Head."

¹⁰² *Comm.* on Exod 23:20-22, CTS, 403. Cf. *Comm.* on Matt 23:37, CC, 69: "I said before that Christ is speaking in the Person of God and I mean that these words really belong to His eternal Godhead. He is not talking now of what He began to do from the time that He was revealed in the flesh, but is proclaiming how much He has been concerned for the salvation of His people from the beginning. We know that the Church was governed by God in such a way that Christ presided, insofar as He was the eternal wisdom of God. In this sense Paul says that, not God the Father was tempted in the wilderness, but Christ Himself – his first letter to the Corinthians, 10.9." Calvin's insistence that it was Christ and not the Father who was tempted in the wilderness is in direct response to Erasmus, see *Comm.* on 1 Cor 10:9, CC, 209: "Erasmus' evasion carries no weight: 'let us not tempt Christ, as some of them tempted God', for it is forcing it too much to supply the name of God."

¹⁰³ Calvin is at great pains to emphasise that Christ did not become incarnate nor did he ever take on the nature of angels whenever he appeared in "human" form in the Old Testament. Rather, as he notes in his *Comm.* on Gen 48:16, CTS, 430: "Nevertheless though Christ appeared in the form of an angel, we must remember what the Apostle says to the Hebrews, (ii. 16) that 'he took not on him the nature of angels,' so as to become one of *them*, in the manner in which he truly became man; for even when angels put on human bodies, they did not, on that account, become men." Compare *Comm.* on Josh 5:13-15, CTS, 87-88: "We have said that in the books of Moses the name of Jehovah is often attributed to the presiding Angel, who was undoubtedly the only-begotten Son of God. He is indeed very God, and yet, in the person of Mediator by dispensation, he is inferior to God. I willingly receive what ancient writers teach on this subject, - that when Christ anciently appeared in human form, it was a prelude to the mystery which was afterwards exhibited when 'God was manifested in the flesh. We

the "perpetual mediator" of God's providence.¹⁰⁴ "The orthodox doctors of the church," he writes "have rightly and prudently interpreted that chief angel to be God's Word, who already at that time, as a sort of foretaste, began to fulfill the office of Mediator. For even though he was not yet clothed with flesh, he came down, so to speak, as an intermediary, in order to approach believers more intimately. Therefore this closer intercourse gave him the name of angel."¹⁰⁵ Christ's mediatorial role is necessitated by the fact that "there was always so wide a distance between God and men, that, without a mediator, there could be no communication".¹⁰⁶ Right "from the beginning God made no communication with men except by Christ", for "there is no relationship between God and us unless the Mediator be present to procure his favour for us."¹⁰⁷ While the main thrust of Calvin's use of the term "Mediator" has reference to the need of fallen man for

must beware, however, of imagining that Christ at that time became incarnate, since, *first*, we nowhere read that God sent his Son in the flesh before the fulness of the times; and, *secondly*, Christ, in so far as he was a man, believed to be the Son of David. But as is said in Ezekiel, (chap. i) it was only a likeness of man. Whether it was a substantial body or an outward form, it is needless to discuss, as it seems wrong to insist on any particular view of the subject."

¹⁰⁴ *Comm.* on Gen 48:16, CTS, 429-430: "Wherefore it is necessary that Christ should be here meant, who does not bear in vain the title of Angel, because he had become the perpetual Mediator. And Paul testifies that he was the Leader and Guide of the journey of his ancient people. (1 Cor. x. 4.) He had not yet indeed been sent by the Father, to approach more nearly to us by taking our flesh, but because he was always the bond of connection between God and man, and because God formally manifested himself in no other way than through him, he is properly called the Angel. To which may be added, that the faith of the fathers was always fixed on his future mission. He was therefore the Angel, because even then he poured forth his rays, that the saints might approach God, through him, as Mediator. For there was always so wide a distance between God and men, that, without a mediator, there could be no communication."

¹⁰⁵ *Inst.* 1.13.10 (133). Cf. *Comm.* on Exod 3:2, CTS, 61: "...the ancient teachers of the Church have rightly understood that the Eternal Son of God is so called in respect to his office as Mediator, which he figuratively bore from the beginning, although he really took it upon him only at his incarnation." Also, *Comm.* on Exod 23:20-22, CTS, 404: "Besides, we have already said that there is no absurdity in designating Christ by the name of the Angel, because He was not yet the Incarnate Mediator, but as often as He appeared to the ancient people He gave an indication of His future mission."

¹⁰⁶ *Comm.* on Gen 48:16, CTS, 430.

¹⁰⁷ *Comm.* on Acts 7:30, CC, 190. Cf. *Comm.* on 1 Cor 10:9, CC, 209: "...for just as God has never shown his graciousness to his people except through him as Mediator, in the same way He has conferred no benefit except at his hand."

salvation,¹⁰⁸ it should not be overlooked that the term encompasses much more for Calvin. Commenting on the phrase, “in the hand of a mediator” found in Gal 3:20, while Calvin agreed with the ancient expositors that this should be applied to Christ, he nevertheless differ as to the exact meaning of “Mediator” here. “‘Mediator’,” he writes, “does not, as they think, signify here one who makes peace, as in 1 Tim 2:5, but a messenger employed in publishing the law.”¹⁰⁹ Calvin goes on to add:

We are thus to understand that since the beginning of the world God has held no communication with men but through the intervention of His Eternal Wisdom or Son. Hence Peter says that the holy prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ (Acts 2.25) and Paul makes Him the Leader of the people in the wilderness (1 Cor 10.4). And certainly the Angel who appeared to Moses can be regarded as none other, for He claims to Himself the peculiar and essential name of God, which is never given to creatures. As He is the Mediator of reconciliation, by whom we are accepted of God, and the Mediator of intercession, through whom the way is opened for us to call upon the Father, so He has always been the Mediator of all teaching, because by Him God has always revealed Himself to men. And he wanted to state this expressly that the Galatians might learn that he who is the foundation of the free covenant held also the primacy in giving the law.¹¹⁰

For Calvin, then, Christ is not only the Mediator of God’s salvation for fallen mankind. He is the Mediator for all communication between God

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, *Inst.* 2.6.1-2 (340-345) where Calvin argues that “after the fall of the first man, no knowledge of God apart from the Mediator has had power unto salvation... Accordingly, apart from the Mediator, God never showed favour toward the ancient people, nor ever gave hope of grace to them... From this it is now clear enough that, since God cannot without the Mediator be propitious toward the human race, under the law Christ was always set before the holy fathers as the end to which they should direct their faith.”

¹⁰⁹ *Comm.* on Gal 3:20, CC, 62.

¹¹⁰ *Comm.* on Gal 3:20, CC, 62.

and man, including intercession, the revelation of God's law and, needless to say, God's providence. This is evident from the fact that in the very context where Calvin calls Christ "the perpetual Mediator", he highlights providence as an important aspect of that mediatorial role:

Now since we are taught, in these words, that the peculiar office of Christ is to defend us and to deliver us from all evil, let us take heed not to bury this grace in impious oblivion: yea, seeing that now it is more clearly exhibited to us, than formerly to the saints under the law, since Christ openly declares that the faithful are committed to his care, that not one of them might perish, (John xvii. 12) so much the more ought it to flourish in our hearts, both that it may be highly celebrated by us with suitable praise, and that it may stir us up to seek this guardianship of our best Protector. And this is exceedingly necessary for us; for if we reflect how many dangers surround us, that we scarcely pass a day without being delivered from a thousand deaths; whence does this arise, except from that care which is taken of us, by the Son of God, who has received us under his protection, from the hand of his Father.¹¹¹

That Christ's mediation in providence is crucial to Calvin's thought is best exemplified by his comments on Jacob's ladder found in Gen 28:12. Calvin demurs from the Jewish interpretation which takes the ladder as a figure of the divine providence; rather, as he so fully expounds:

But to us, who hold to this principle, that the covenant of God was founded in Christ, and that Christ himself was the eternal image of the Father, in which he manifested himself to the holy patriarchs, there is nothing in this vision intricate or ambiguous. For since men are alienated from God by sin, though he fills and sustains all

¹¹¹ *Comm.* on Gen 48:16, *CTS*, 430.

things by his power, yet that communication by which he would draw us to himself is not perceived by us; but, on the other hand, so greatly are we at variance with him, that, regarding him as adverse to us, we, in our turn, flee from his presence. Moreover the angels, to whom is committed the guardianship of the human race, while strenuously applying themselves to their office, yet do not communicate with us in such a way that we become conscious of their presence. It is Christ alone, therefore, who connects heaven and earth: he is the only Mediator who reaches from heaven down to earth: he is the medium through which the fulness of all celestial blessings flows down to us, and through which we, in turn, ascend to God. He it is who, being the head over angels, causes them to minister to his earthly members. Therefore, (as we read in John i. 51) he properly claims for himself this honour, that after he shall have been manifested in the world, angels shall ascend and descend. If then, we say that the ladder is a figure of Christ, the exposition will not be forced. For the similitude of a ladder well suits the Mediator, through whom ministering angels, righteousness and life, with all the graces of the Holy Spirit, descend to us step by step. We, also, who were not only fixed to the earth, but plunged into the depths of the curse, and into hell itself, ascend even unto God. Also, the God of hosts is seated on the ladder; because the fulness of the Deity dwells in Christ; and hence also it is, that it reaches unto heaven. For although all power is committed even to his human nature by the Father, he still would not truly sustain our faith, unless he were God manifested in the flesh. And the fact that the body of Christ is finite, does not prevent him from filling heaven and earth, because his grace and power are everywhere diffused. Whence also, Paul being witness, he ascended into heaven that he might fill all things. They who translate the particle ...by the word "near", entirely destroy the sense of the passage. For Moses wishes to state that the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in the person of the Mediator. Christ not only approached unto us, but clothed

himself in our nature, that he might make us one with himself. That the ladder was a symbol of Christ, is also confirmed by this consideration, that nothing was more suitable than that God should ratify his covenant of eternal salvation in his Son to his servant Jacob. And hence we feel unspeakable joy, when we hear that Christ, who so far excels all creatures, is nevertheless joined with us. The majesty, indeed, of God, which here presents itself conspicuously to view, ought to inspire terror; so that every knee should bow to Christ, that all creatures should look up to him and adore him, and that all flesh should keep silence in his presence. But his friendly and lovely image is at the same time depicted; that we may know by his descent, that heaven is opened to us, and the angels of God are rendered familiar to us. For hence we have fraternal society with them, since the common Head both of them and us has his station on earth.¹¹²

The above citation informs us that while Calvin clearly has in mind Christ's mediatorial role in salvation,¹¹³ he does not deny that the dream in itself is providential nor that certain aspects of the dream signifies God's providential care.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, he even writes that the ladder "indicates that only through Christ's intercession is it brought about that the angels' ministrations come to us."¹¹⁵ So clearly, Calvin does not hesitate to affirm the import of divine providence in the dream. What Calvin is at pains to

¹¹² *Comm.* on Gen 28:12, CTS, 112-114.

¹¹³ Compare *Inst.* 2.9.2 (425): "Nevertheless, because he has in his flesh accomplished the whole of our salvation, this living manifestation of realities has justly won a new and singular commendation. From this derives Christ's saying: 'Afterward you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' [John 1:51p.]. Although he seems here to allude to the ladder shown in a vision to the patriarch Jacob [Gen 28:12], how excellent his advent is he has marked through opening by it the gate of heaven, that each one of us may enter there."

¹¹⁴ See *Comm.* on Gen 28:12, CTS, 112, where the editors in a footnote, wrongly assumed that Calvin "appears to have dismissed too hastily the opinion of the Jews, that the vision was symbolical of *Providence*." What Calvin dismissed is the Jewish opinion that the "ladder", not Jacob's vision, is symbolical of divine providence.

¹¹⁵ *Inst.* 1.14.12 (172).

emphasise though is that the ladder, according to Christ's own teaching in John 1:51, is Christ himself. As such, the ladder signifies that Christ alone is the mediator of God's providence, just as much as Christ alone is the mediator of God's salvation.

Thus, once again, Calvin shows his dependence upon the authority of the New Testament for his interpretation of the Old Testament by linking together Gen 28:12 and John 1:51. It should be noted that in linking Christ with the ladder in Jacob's dream, Calvin departed somewhat from the early Church fathers. Justin Martyr makes no direct reference to the ladder. He merely notes that the Lord of Hosts Jacob saw in the dream was none other than "He who is both Angel and God and Lord, and who appeared as a man to Abraham, and who wrestled in human form with Jacob."¹¹⁶ Of the ladder, Tertullian writes,

We shall without hesitation venture to suppose, that by this ladder the Lord has in judgement appointed that the way to heaven is shown to men, whereby some may attain to it, and others fall therefrom.¹¹⁷

He goes on to indicate that, to his mind, the ladder signifies the winnowing effect of persecution, while the angels signify those who mount up either to higher or lower places.¹¹⁸ Augustine, on numerous occasions, links together Gen 28:12 and John 1:51¹¹⁹ but gives no emphasis to "the

¹¹⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 58, ANF 1:226.

¹¹⁷ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.25, ANF 3:343.

¹¹⁸ Tertullian, *De Fuga In Persecutione* 1, ANF 4:117: "Persecution, by means of which one is declared either approved or rejected, is just the judgment of the Lord. But the judging properly belongs to God alone. This is that fan which even now cleanses the Lord's threshing-floor - the Church, I mean - winnowing the mixed heap of believers, and separating the grain of the martyrs from the chaff of the deniers; and this is also the ladder of which Jacob dreams, on which are seen, some mounting up to higher places, and others going down to lower. So, too, persecution may be viewed as a contest."

¹¹⁹ Leon Morris, citing J H Bernard, notes that Augustine was one of the first to connect Genesis 28:13 and John 1:51. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 171.

ladder". Rather, he offers the interpretation that Christ is not the ladder so much as the stone upon which Jacob slept!¹²⁰

Calvin, obviously, would have disagreed with Augustine. Christ is the ladder, and not the stone, upon which the angels ascend and descend. In that respect, Bray is quite right to suggest that Calvin, in his christological emphasis, set a new standard for biblical interpretation by breaking with the spiritual interpretation of the past, and even with Luther's idea of "Christ in all the Scriptures". For Calvin,

Christ was the fulfilment of the Old Testament and the theme of the New, but that did not mean that every verse necessarily contained some hidden reference to him. Rather, the interpreter must be careful to relate every passage of Scripture to Christ, whatever it actually said in itself, and not to interpret it in a way which would destroy the gospel... Finding Christ in the Old Testament was for Calvin a more subtle business than it was for most of his contemporaries and predecessors...¹²¹

Calvin was very careful to ensure that if he should find any direct reference to Christ in the Old Testament, it must be warranted by the testimony of the New Testament. In his understanding of Christ as the Mediator of providence, Calvin found such warrant in the inter-connection of the different motifs discussed above, namely, the Angel of Yahweh, the Rock, and the ladder in Jacob's dream.

¹²⁰ For instance, he writes in *Sermons on NT Lessons* 39.5, *NPNF* 6:391: "... when Jacob anointed the stone which he had placed at his head as he slept, and in his sleep saw a mysterious dream, ladders rising from the earth to heaven, and Angels ascending and descending, and the Lord standing upon the ladder, he understood what it was designed to figure, and took the stone for a figure of Christ, to prove to us thereby that he was no stranger to the understanding of that vision and revelation." Cf. *On the Psalms*, Ps 45:18, *NPNF* 8:151: "This was figured in Jacob's placing a stone at his head, and so sleeping. The patriarch Jacob had placed a stone at his head: sleeping with that stone at his head, he saw heaven opened, and a ladder from heaven to earth, and Angels ascending and descending; after this vision he awaked, anointed the stone, and departed. In that 'stone' he understood Christ; for that reason he anointed it."

¹²¹ Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), 203.

Willis, in discussing Calvin's use of the term "Mediator", maintains that while the primary sense of 'Mediator' for Calvin is *Deus manifestatus in carne*, and therefore, Christ's role in salvation, alongside this predominant use, Calvin expands the meaning to also include the Eternal Son of God who, even before he was clothed with flesh, was the only channel between God and fallen, even unfallen man.¹²² The subject of the main portions of *Inst.* 2.7-11 is precisely this: before the incarnation, Christ was the Mediator between fallen man and God. As noted above, he was then present under figures (like Jacob's ladder and the Rock who led Israel through the wilderness) and more directly under the form of the Angel of Yahweh. Indeed, Calvin speaks of Christ as the Mediator before the incarnation even prior to and apart from the Fall:

Even if man had remained free from all stain, his condition would have been too lowly for him to reach God without a Mediator.¹²³

Referring to Calvin's reply to the Polish brethren in his *Responsum ad Fratres Polonos*.¹²⁴ Willis writes,

Calvin here subjects the idea of mediation to two different nuances: mediation as reconciliation and mediation as sustenance. As reconciler, the Mediator was ordained because of the Fall to restore the broken relationship between God and man. As sustainer, the Mediator always was the way creation was preserved and ordered. The performance of reconciling mediation

¹²² E David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1966), 68.

¹²³ See, *Inst.* 2.12.1 (465) and Willis, *ibid*, 69.

¹²⁴ Willis' translation of the 1560 letter (CO IX, 338) is as follows: "Thus we understand first that the name of Mediator applies to Christ not only because he took on flesh or because he took on the office of reconciling the human race with God. But already from the beginning of creation he was truly Mediator because he was always the Head of the Church and held primacy even over the angels and was the first-born of all creatures... Whence we conclude that he began to perform the office of Mediator not only after the fall of Adam but insofar as he is the Eternal Son of God, angels as well as men were joined to God in order that they might remain upright." See, Willis, *ibid*, 70.

acknowledges that, according to the flesh in which he was manifested, the Son was below and obedient to the Father. But the performance of sustaining mediation means that the Eternal Son's full equality of nature with the Father was not diminished just because the Father ordered the universe through him.¹²⁵

In other words,

Christ as Eternal Son mediated the divine ordering of the universe from its beginning; Christ as Eternal Son manifested in the flesh performed the reconciling mediation without the cessation or diminution of his mediation of the divine ordering of the universe. The Eternal Son's ordering of creation according to the Father's will is the more comprehensive category, and his reordering and restoring of rebellious man are special forms and instances of the inclusive office of the Son. It is the same Person who orders unfallen creation and who reconciles rebellious creation.¹²⁶

Calvin's exposition of divine providence is, therefore, no less emphatically christological as it is Trinitarian. As the perpetual Mediator between God and man, Christ not only became fallen mankind's Redeemer; he has always been the "channel" through whom God the Father dispenses his benefits to mankind from eternity.

IV. CONCLUSION

The question of the particular God-concept employed by Calvin in his exposition of divine providence can now be answered: it is none other than the Triune God so clearly revealed in Scripture. In affirming this, Calvin was not only differentiating his God-concept from that of other

¹²⁵ Willis, *ibid*, 70.

¹²⁶ Willis, *ibid*, 71.

monotheists; he is also indicating that he has a different hermeneutical approach in arriving at this God-concept. That hermeneutical approach gives priority to the New Testament testimony concerning the Triune God, as opposed to the other monotheists. The Jews and Muslims reject the New Testament testimony concerning the deity of Christ. The fanatics and Papists reject the sole "Mediatorship" of Christ and thus, by implication, reject the deity of Christ so clearly enunciated in the New Testament.

Alongside this commitment to the sole authority of the New Testament testimony and its interpretation of the Old Testament, Calvin also shows his commitment to the Nicene formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. This commitment, however, is qualified. As the above discussion has shown, where the early Church fathers agreed with the New Testament testimony, Calvin was ready to accept their views. But where they disagreed with what he understands to be the New Testament testimony, as is obvious with the Angel of Yahweh motif and the ladder in Jacob's dream, he was more than ready to reject or ignore the views of the early Church fathers. For Calvin, then, it is the New Testament testimony and its interpretation of the Old Testament alone which holds supreme authority for him.

Not to be overlooked is the importance of Calvin's thought on divine providence to the whole discussion of the Trinity. While his primary concern in *Inst.* 1.13 is to expound the doctrine of the Trinity, it cannot be doubted – as the above discussion has clearly shown – that divine providence is no mere appendix to that exposition. The fact that Calvin constantly reverts to Christ's eternal ordering of the universe before and after the fall of man indicates that the doctrine of divine providence forms a crucial part of the cumulative evidence from Scripture for the deity of Christ. This is evident from the christological emphasis in his exposition of divine providence. In emphasising the mediating sustenance of the eternal Son of God, Calvin was clearly attributing to Christ what is due to God alone.

This study commenced with the contention that if one is to understand Calvin on divine providence and the God of providence,

serious consideration must be given to the final location of not only the *locus classicus*, important though that is, but also to the chapters preceding it within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*.¹²⁷ The reason, as this study has sought to demonstrate, is that if Calvin had moved *Inst.* 1.11-15 at the same time as the *locus classicus*, it must be because he views them as closely related, not only to each other, but also to the rest of Book 1. The foregoing discussion has, in my opinion, established conclusively that the subject of divine providence cannot be divorced from Calvin's other emphases within Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes*, not least, from the emphases of *Inst.* 1.11-15. Only as we look at the *locus classicus* within its final context can we come to a proper understanding of Calvin on divine providence and, of course, the God of providence.

It only remains for this study to examine a particular case of a misreading of Calvin on divine providence arising precisely from just such a neglect of the final location of the *locus classicus*.

¹²⁷ See especially Chapter 2, page 38ff.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BARTH ON CALVIN AND PROVIDENCE

I. WHY KARL BARTH?

The task of this chapter is to examine a particular example of how one can misread Calvin's God-concept in his exposition of divine providence. The choice of Karl Barth as a candidate for critique may seem somewhat arbitrary at the outset. However, two particular considerations, to my mind, will substantiate the selection of Barth.

First of all, there is Barth's affinity for Calvin. It has been widely acknowledged that Barth, more than any other modern theologian, has been instrumental in the so-called revival of Reformation theology in this century. Gabriel Vahanian speaks for many when he observed:

Everyone acknowledges that Barth has been the leader of the so-called revival *of the spirit* of Reformation theology in the present day, and that this means for him primarily Reformed theology.¹

Of the Reformers, it would seem that it is John Calvin whom Barth follows most closely. While Barth's dependence upon and faithfulness in interpreting Calvin have been questioned by some scholars, it nevertheless has been recognised even by his critics that Barth's positive influence upon Reformed

¹ Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, Ed. Jean-Louis Leuba, Tr. Gabriel Vahanian (London: Fontana Books, 1960), 7. [Italics, original.] Of this volume, which comprises Barth's comments on Calvin's Catechism of the Church of Geneva (1545), Vahanian writes: "Seldom has Barth been so close to Calvin, and Calvin so close to us, as in the present work...", *ibid*, 7. For any comparative study of Barth and Calvin, this volume should be consulted. More recently, Bernard Ramm has contended that "Barth's method of coming to terms with modern learning and historical Reformed theology is the most consistent paradigm for evangelical theology" today. Ramm's recommendation is based upon his observation that "Barth's theology is a restatement of Reformed theology written in the aftermath of the Enlightenment but not capitulating to it." See Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 23 and 26.

theology has been considerable.² Torrance, in discussing the development of Barth's theology, characterised Barth's dependence upon and great indebtedness to Calvin in the following words:

All the way through one can see struggling together his concern for a biblically grounded theology which he inherited from Calvin and his concern to think it out in the wealth of modern thought which he inherited from Schleiermacher.³

Vahanian maintains that both Barth and Calvin have a common allegiance; and it is this allegiance and this alone that accounts for the degree of subjection of Barth's thought to that of Calvin.⁴

Secondly, this affinity of Barth for Calvin is partly reflected in the former's treatment of the subject of divine providence. In his definitive treatment of the subject found in his *Church Dogmatics, Volume III, Part 3*, Barth admits his dependence upon the "older orthodox dogmatics".⁵

² Cornelius Van Til has devoted two books to criticising Barth for going beyond Calvin, namely, *The New Modernism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946) and *Christianity and Barthianism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962). Despite his criticisms, Van Til could still say that some of Barth's "effects have been good". See, *Christianity and Barthianism*, 209. Compare, for instance, G C Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 39-74; also, Richard Muller's article, "The Place and Importance of Karl Barth in the Twentieth Century: A Review Essay", *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 127-156 where he helpfully reviews four recent volumes of collected essays written in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Barth's birth and, in the process, deals critically with those who agree or disagree with Barth. Note also Muller's other articles: "Directions in the Study of Barth's Christology", *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 119-134; "Karl Barth and the Path of Theology in the Twentieth Century: Historical Observations", *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989): 25-50.

³ In the "Introduction" to Karl Barth, *Theology and Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 50.

⁴ Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 8. Indeed, he adds, "It is no exaggeration to say that there is a similarity between the inner structure of Barth's thought and that of Calvin, for both are related to the Creed." See, *ibid*, 9. Barth himself had once eulogised that "the greatness of Calvin's conception of theology... is an explication of the thesis that the sum of all wisdom consists in the true knowledge of God and of ourselves." This was quoted in "Zum 400. Todestag Calvins", *Evangelische Theologie*, Mai 1964, 226, by John Hesselink, "The Development and Purpose of Calvin's Institutes", in *The Reformed Theological Review*, XXIV:3, October 1965, 68.

⁵ In his preface, Barth noted: "In the doctrine of providence, which I desire should be

Whitehouse has observed that by this phrase Barth meant, in particular, Thomas Aquinas and the Reformed Divines.⁶ A survey of *Church Dogmatics III/3* reveals Barth refers to Calvin more often than any other person, with the exception of Aquinas. There are altogether sixteen direct references to Calvin. Of these, six deal with the subject of angels. The remaining ten references deal directly with the subject of divine providence. What is interesting about the references to divine providence is this: six of the ten references to Calvin actually appear in Section 48, the first section ("The Doctrine of Providence, Its Basis and Form") of the 11th chapter of *Church Dogmatics III/3*. Indeed, there are more references to Calvin in this one section of fifty-five pages than to any other author, including Aquinas. It would seem, therefore, that in his introductory section, where he lays down the basis and form of providence, Barth was most interested in Calvin and his view of providence.

The remaining four references to divine providence are found in Section 49, under the head, "God the Father as the Lord of His Creature". While proportionately less than the previous section, these references are crucial because Barth here expands his agreement or disagreement with Calvin in Section 48. It would seem, therefore, that Barth's references to Calvin in *Church Dogmatics III/3* would be a good point of departure for just such a discussion as to whether Barth had accurately read Calvin's doctrine of divine providence.

Of the six references to Calvin in Section 48, three are positive commendations of Calvin's view, while the remaining three are criticisms. In Section 49, while Barth is more accommodating, his criticisms of Calvin and

regarded as the real substance of this volume, I have found it possible to keep far more closely to the scheme of the older orthodox dogmatics (*conservatio, concursus, gubernatio*) than I anticipated. The radical correction which I have also undertaken will not be overlooked." Barth, *Church Dogmatics Volume III, Part 3: The Doctrine of Creation*, Tr. G W Bromiley and R J Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), xii.

⁶ "What he [Barth] has to say is not excitingly novel. He is happy to work with the analysis of the subject found in older works of theology, notably in the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas and in the Reformed (rather than the Lutheran) divines." See Rev. W.A. Whitehouse, "Providence: An Account of Karl Barth's Doctrine", and "God's Heavenly Kingdom and His Servants the Angels: An Account of *Kirchliche Dogmatik III/3*", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 4(1951):241.

the Reformers are no less serious. The task here is to examine Barth's criticisms of Calvin's doctrine of providence, in particular, and having examined them to evaluate if they are a fair reading of Calvin or not.

The criticisms of Barth may be divided under two heads corresponding with the respective two sections.

II. BARTH ON CALVIN AND THE DEFINITION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Barth's first reference to Calvin on providence is found very early on in his *Church Dogmatics III/3*, soon after his assertion that a clear distinction must be made between creation and providence.⁷ Creation is not only *creatio ex nihilo*; it is a "once-for-all-act, not repeated or repeatable, beginning in and with time and ending in it".⁸ In that sense, providence cannot be a *continuata rerum creatio*. Rather, providence presupposes that the work of creation is done and done perfectly, and therefore concluded. That being the case, providence must not be viewed as "further acts of creation".⁹ Providence "guarantees and confirms the work of creation" by accompanying, surrounding and sustaining what God has created.¹⁰ Contrary to Heppe, Barth maintains that Calvin made the same distinction.¹¹ The danger, he

⁷ "The most important biblical representation of the relationship but also the difference between creation on the one side and the covenant and providence on the other is the account of the seventh day of creation which concludes the first creation saga... The fact that God rested means that He did not continue His work of creation. He was content with the creation of the world and man. He had planned and had now accomplished this and not another work, completing and concluding it with the creation of man... To this extent the seventh day implies a break between the work of creation and all the divine work which follows - a break which we must not forget when we consider the relationship between Creator and creature. It is tempting to think that creation and providence (especially from the standpoint that the former entails the preservation of the creature) are necessarily identical *realiter, respectu Dei*, providence being only a *continuata rerum creatio*." *Ibid*, 7.

⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

¹¹ "But this view [that is, the view that providence should not be perceived as a *continuata rerum creatio* and should be held as distinct and different from creation] was not so important in the older Reformed theology as Heppe maintains. Calvin did not know it, and

says, of not positing that distinction is this: "it could only be harmful to Christian perception in this matter."¹² The term to note here is the word "Christian", for it is this term which lies at the heart of Barth's interest in the next subsection of *Church Dogmatics III/3*, "The Christian belief in Providence". Furthermore, Barth is positively asserting that Calvin's view of providence is "Christian" with respect to the distinction between creation and providence. Given that fact and that Barth also acknowledges the contribution of the Reformers to the doctrine of providence,¹³ it is, to say the least, most surprising that in this very same subsection he should go on to charge the Reformers, including Calvin, with teaching a less than Christian belief in providence.

This becomes evident when, having distinguished the Christian God from the God of Judaism and Islam on the basis that "the God of the Christian belief is seen in the fulfilment of the covenant between Himself and man as this has taken place in Jesus Christ",¹⁴ Barth adds that older Protestant theology (including Calvin) failed to posit the Christian meaning and character of the doctrine of providence.¹⁵ While Barth concedes that

even in the presentations of later writers it does not play any very striking, let alone a dominant role." *Ibid*, 7.

¹² "Systematised and posited absolutely, it could only be harmful to Christian perception in this matter. It would force us to choose between not understanding creation as genuine *creatio (ex nihilo)* in view of providence, and regarding providence as a series of pure creative acts in view of creation. It is true enough that creation and providence, like all the works of God, are one in their divine origin. But in God there is multiplicity and fulness as well as unity, and these are not *realiter* mutually exclusive antitheses, just as God's eternity does not exclude but includes time. Hence we do not violate the dignity of God, but properly regard it, if without denying their unity in the divine will we accept the difference between creation and providence as seriously demanded by Gen. 2:1-8." *Ibid*, 7-8.

¹³ For example, in discussing the Christian belief of providence, Barth writes: "In the sense of the Gospel there can be no doubt that to believe always means with childlike directness to accept the providence of God, to rejoice in it, and to follow its governance. And it is no accident that the Reformation with its rediscovery of the all-sufficiency of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the true divine sonship in Him of the sinful man who may cling to the grace of God and this alone, self-evidently carried with it in all its great representatives, Calvin no less than Zwingli and Zwingli no less than Luther, a kind of re-birth of the Christian belief in providence." *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁵ "But we have to take note of the astonishing fact that the older Protestant theology was guilty of an almost total failure even to ask concerning the Christian meaning and character

Calvin did get it right elsewhere, the same certainly cannot be said of the *Institutes*.¹⁶ He concludes:

But surely this thought should have been worked out in *Instit.*, I, 16-18, if it was as important as Niesel says. Such ideas did not control his own exposition, nor were they developed in the age which followed.¹⁷

What is evident is that Barth is unhappy that Calvin and the other Reformers did not assert the Christian belief in providence. He is equally unhappy that Calvin did not assert that belief in his *Institutes* 1.16-18.

This raises the question as to what Barth means by the "Christian belief" in providence. The answer may be traced to what Barth terms as the "christological" basis of providence.¹⁸ Barth leaves us in no doubt when he insists that the Christian belief in providence is wholly based upon "the revelation of God in Jesus Christ".¹⁹ It is the belief "that Christ is the image in which God has shown us not merely His heart, namely, His love addressed to us in Him, but also His hands and feet, namely, His external works in the

of the doctrine of providence, let alone to assert it. Even in Calvin (*Instit.*, I, 16-18) we seek in vain for a single pointer in this direction. It would be excellent if we could accept the assurance of W. Niesel (*Die Theologie Calvins*, 1938, pp. 66f., E.T., 1956, p. 71f.) that Calvin understands the doctrine of providence wholly on the basis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and in it "praises the power and goodness of the triune God who has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ." But unfortunately I have not found this assertion supported in the very slightest by the passages which Niesel quotes." *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁶ "That Calvin did occasionally think along these lines is shown by the preface to his commentary on Genesis. He there explains that Christ is the image in which God has shown us not merely His heart, namely, His love addressed to us in Him, but also His hand and feet, namely, His external works in the sphere of creation. And he there warns that if we do not keep strictly to Christ we can only be betrayed into the wildest hallucinations in respect of these external works of God." He goes on to add that there is a similar statement in Calvin's *Treatise on The Eternal Predestination of God* of 1552. *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁸ "All these differences [i.e., differences between the Christian God and the God of Judaism and Islam] may now be accepted as already elucidated, and this means that we are not only not obliged but forbidden to use a non-Christian concept of God, i.e., a concept which does not rest on a christological basis." *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

sphere of creation".²⁰

To elucidate further what he means by "christological", Barth goes on to contrast Calvin and the Reformers with the *Heidelberg Catechism*. He writes:

We recall Qu. 26-28 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* with their repeated underlining of the decisive concept of the fatherliness of God and their express christological explanation of this concept. And what important consequences it would have had if the dogmaticians had taken seriously what is written under Qu. 50..., namely, that Christ has gone up to heaven to show Himself there as the Head of the Christian Church "by whom the Father rules all things"! But to the best of my knowledge these are isolated texts in the 16th and 17th centuries. The orthodox Lutheran and Reformed teachers are rather at one in teaching the divine lordship over all occurrence both as a whole and in detail without attempting to say what is the meaning and purpose of this lordship. They understand it as the act of a superior and absolutely omniscient, omnipotent and omnioperative being whose nature and work do of course display such moral qualities as wisdom, righteousness and goodness, etc. But this is all. According to the agreed doctrine of orthodoxy, this empty shell is the object of the Christian belief in providence. It does not seem to have occurred to whole generations of Protestant theologians to ask what this lordship has to do with Jesus Christ, and the knowledge and confession of this lordship, and readiness to subject oneself to it, with faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.²¹

Thus, for Barth, the Reformers' presentation of the God of providence

²⁰ *Ibid*, 30.

²¹ *Ibid*, 30-31. It is interesting to note how, when expounding the first article of The Apostles' Creed as found in Calvin's *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1545), Barth shows a similar and, therefore, consistent preference for the *Heidelberg Catechism*. See his *The Faith of the Church*, 37-39.

is nothing but an empty shell because they have left out the "christological" basis of providence. They have not asserted the fact that when the Bible speaks of providence, it is specifically the providence of the eternal Father of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Fatherhood of God as revealed through Jesus Christ seems to lie at the heart of Barth's own doctrine of providence. This is borne out not merely by his words found above,²² but also by the subtitles to the first two sections of his *Church Dogmatics III/3*.²³ He seems concerned to link providence with God's fatherly care, but only in as much as it refers to the care of the Father of Jesus Christ.

Barth traces the omission of the "christological" basis on the part of Calvin and his fellow Reformers, and those who followed them, to their adoption of a "natural theology" (*theologia naturalis*), or worse, "naturalism" (*naturalissima*) itself.²⁴ That being the case, Barth says, it is not surprising, therefore, that the God of providence presented by Calvin and the Reformers and later Protestantism "really amounts to no more than what Seneca and Cicero could say in other words".²⁵ Thus, in Barth's view, not only is Calvin's presentation of providence suspect from the perspective of Christology; it is also suspect from the perspective of theology proper. Calvin had a defective doctrine of God, and especially the Fatherhood of God.

²² Barth's prefers the *Heidelberg Catechism* because it asserts the 'decisive concept of the fatherliness of God and their express christological explanation of this concept' in their doctrine of providence." *Ibid*, 30-31.

²³ In Section 48, under the heading, "The Doctrine of Providence, Its Basis and Form", the subtitle is: "The doctrine of providence deals with the history of created being as such, in the sense that in every respect and in its whole span this proceeds under the fatherly care of God the Creator, whose will is done and is to be seen in His election of grace, and therefore in the history of the covenant between Himself and man, and therefore in Jesus Christ." Similarly, in Section 49, entitled, "God the Father as Lord of His Creature", the subtitle is: "God fulfils his fatherly lordship over His creature by preserving, accompanying and ruling the whole course of its earthly existence. He does this as His mercy is revealed and active in the creaturely sphere in Jesus Christ, and the lordship of His Son is thus manifested to it." *Ibid*, 3 and 58 respectively.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 32. One wonders if Barth, by mentioning Seneca and Cicero in particular, is not indirectly implicating Calvin more than any of the other Reformers, since it is common knowledge that Calvin is well acquainted with both these ancient philosophers, especially the former.

Closely related to above criticism is the corollary criticism that Calvin did not expound the theological relationship between faith in Jesus Christ and divine providence. Barth writes:

Unfortunately the connection between the belief in providence and belief in Christ had not been worked out and demonstrated theologically by the Reformers themselves. Only occasionally and from afar, if at all, had they seen the problem of natural theology and the necessity of a radical application to all theology of their recognition of the free grace of God in Christ.²⁶

So that Barth's criticism of Calvin's doctrine of providence is not merely confined to the latter's Christology but also his soteriology. Of course, that is very understandable. If Christian providence, as Barth means it, is to have a "christological" basis, it inevitably implies that faith must be faith in Jesus Christ as the revelation of God the Father. Otherwise, it cannot be Christian faith at all. What needs to be emphasised, however, is that for Barth, while faith in Jesus Christ is a necessary corollary of a "christologically"-based presentation of providence, what makes providence a Christian doctrine, as he means it, is that it must be "christological". If one's definition of providence is based solidly upon Jesus Christ as the revelation of God the Father, then, the corollary truth concerning the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ becomes inevitable. The latter follows from the former. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that when Barth eventually deals with the subject of "The Christian under the universal Lordship of God the Father",²⁷ he makes no mention of Calvin. He does not believe Calvin has anything at all to say on the subject.

So we are left in no doubt as to what Barth means by the Christian belief in providence. It must be one that arises from the Christian perception of God the Father as revealed by, in and through Jesus Christ. Apart from that perception of God, all ideas of providence can only be construed as

²⁶ *Ibid*, 32.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 239-288.

“unChristian”. And the precise reason why Barth considers Calvin and the Reformers as less than Christian in their view of providence is simply because of this omission of Jesus Christ in the presentation of their view.

One final passage in this section must be looked at before we round off Barth’s criticism of Calvin on providence not only because it serves as a fitting conclusion but also because it clearly delineates some Biblical passages which, Barth believes, were not fully expounded as they should be by Calvin and the Reformers. He writes:

It is strange that the older theology never thought of deducing from the much quoted John 5:17 that in the question as to the meaning and goal of the (works) of God the Father we should look simply and fully at the (works) of the Son which is equated with it. It is strange that Colossians 1:17... (by him all things consist) was constantly adduced and yet the lesson was never learned from it that all things not only have their existence (v 16) but also their consistence, their order and continued existence, their (continuance/existence) (v 17), in the Son of whom it is said in v 14 that we have in Him our redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and in v 15 that He is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature”... It is strange that there was not a more fruitful recollection of Hebrews 1:3, where the Son of God is again indisputably described as “upholding all things by the word of his power”, and immediately afterwards as the One who “when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”... This meant, and still means, that He sits at the place from which heaven and earth are ruled and all power has its origin and centre, not as a passive spectator, but as the epitome of the wisdom, will and power of the Father, and with the Father as the source of the... (quickening spirit) without whom no creature can live and move... What could have been more obvious, one would have thought, than to equate this ruling right hand of God with the One who according to the witness of the New Testament has His place at this right hand? Why did not Calvin and others work out that insight that

the hands and feet of God, like His heart, are revealed in Christ and Him alone?²⁸

III. BARTH ON CALVIN AND THE DIVINE CONCURSUS

While there are four subsections to Section 49 of *Church Dogmatics III/3*,²⁹ all the four references to Calvin in this section are confined to subsection (2) which deals basically with the idea of God's divine accompanying.³⁰ Barth begins by delineating three aspects of this divine accompanying. What is significant to our purpose is that in dealing with all three aspects of the divine accompanying, Barth was keen to emphasise that they find their supreme meaning in the offering of God's grace through Jesus Christ.³¹ Thus, as in Section 48, so here in Section 49, Barth consistently locates his understanding of divine providence within his Christology. He remains ever concerned, as well, that the God of providence presented by him is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 35.

²⁹ The four subsections are: (1) The Divine Preserving; (2) The Divine Accompanying; (3) The Divine Ruling; and (4) The Christian under the Universal Lordship of Christ.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 90-154.

³¹ Of the first aspect, he writes: "Let us at once lift the matter above the level of a merely formal consideration. Alongside the act of the creature there is always the act of divine wisdom and omnipotence. The history of the covenant of grace accompanies the act of the creature from first to last. When by divine preservation the first creature came to exist in activity, God had already acted, offering His grace, making His mercy in Jesus Christ operative and effective to the creature, revealing the majesty of His beloved Son." Of the second, he writes: "But at this point the decisive consideration must be the material one that the God who accompanies the creature is the Lord of the covenant of grace. If God had willed to act alone, or by means of non-autonomous agents or instruments, there would have been no need to institute a covenant, and the fulfilment of His will in creation need not have taken the form of a covenant-history. Again, grace would no longer be grace if its exercise consisted only in the elimination or suppression as an autonomous subject of the one to whom it was extended." Of the third, he writes: "And if we are to understand, then at this third and decisive point we must again think of the form in which God is almighty, genuinely and supremely almighty, in Jesus Christ and in the covenant of grace... At this point there is actualised in its original form the fact that the activity of the creature along the way on which God accompanies it and it can accompany God is simply a confirming of the divine activity. At this point, where we do not see any law but only grace, the fact of God's accompanying can and must be understood as the law of the whole divine co-existence with the creature, as the law of the activity of the divine providence." *Ibid*, 92, 93 and 94 respectively.

This largely explains why it is that Barth again departs from Calvin and the Reformers when he comes to discuss the divine *concursus*. Of course, the autonomy of the creature in relation to God's sovereignty has vexed many theologians and philosophers. Barth is not unaware of this. He maintains that the older dogmatics had "coined the concept of *concursus*" as an attempt to explain the concept of divine accompanying.³² He admits that there is, in fact, Scriptural support for such an idea, and that all that remains now is to try and present "this relation clearly in all the individuality in which it is revealed."³³ Otherwise, Christians will be left with a misleading conception of the divine accompanying.

Barth then proceeds to show how despite the difference in emphasis in their respective concepts of *concursus*, both the Lutheran and Reformed circles borrowed the concept of *causa* from the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of Aquinas.³⁴ Barth does not, at this juncture, commend or criticise the Lutheran and Reformed theologians for their adoption of the concept of *causa*. He merely states what is, to his mind, a matter of historical fact.³⁵

Be that as it may, Barth, however, maintains that the term *causa* is not derived from the Bible. That, in itself does not make it unacceptable. It

³² *Ibid*, 94.

³³ *Ibid*, 95.

³⁴ "...the Reformed no less than the Lutheran, made a formal borrowing at this point from a philosophy and theology which had been re-discovered and re-asserted at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries - the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of Aquinas. The borrowing consisted in the adoption and introduction of a specific terminology to describe the two partners whose activities are understood and represented in the doctrine of the *concursus* in terms of a co-operation, the activity of God on the one side and that of the creature on the other. The concept which was adopted and introduced was that of "cause". For it was by the developing of the dialectic of this concept that they both effected the differentiation of themselves on the one side and the other, and also decided the difference which already existed at this point within the Evangelical faith itself. This, then, is the controlling concept for the form assumed by Evangelical dogmatics in this and in all kindred spirits." *Ibid*, 98.

³⁵ Indeed, he claims that the concept of *causa* was a topic for discussion even in the early part of the 16th century, and this not only in the doctrine of providence of Zwingli and Calvin but also in Luther's *De servo arbitrio*. *Ibid*, 98.

depends on how the term is used.³⁶ Barth then proceeds to delineate five conditions upon which the term *causa* may be used legitimately to explain the doctrine of divine providence. Of these, it is the fifth condition that Barth considers to be the "pre-condition" of the other four conditions.³⁷ Indeed, it is this fifth condition that "the older dogmatics unfortunately did not make any mention".³⁸ What, then, is this fifth condition?

As the doctrine of the *concursum*, and indeed the whole doctrine of providence, is expounded, there must be a clear connection between the first article of the creed and the second. If the causal concept is to be applied legitimately, its content and interpretation must be determined by the fact that what it describes is the operation of the Father of Jesus Christ in relation to that of the creature.

Thus, once again, Barth insists upon his "christological" emphasis, deeming the failure of the Lutheran and Reformed theologians in their exposition of the divine *concursum* to be precisely the lack of this emphasis.

It bears repetition that Barth consistently maintains that there is nothing wrong with the concept of the divine *concursum* nor with the terminology of *causa*. For him, it would seem, the employment of these two ideas were almost inevitable if some sense was to be made of the biblical concept of divine providence.³⁹ If so, why then does he still say the Lutheran

³⁶ "It depends upon whether the dynamic and teleology of its use are determined by and continue to be determined by the fact that when it is introduced into theology its task is to help to an understanding and exposition of the message of the Bible, whether its use gives rise to a dynamic and exposition which are foreign to the message of the Bible and under the pressure of which there emerge theological conceptions and asseverations which are foreign and even completely antithetical to that message. But the fact that the terminology is pressed into service does not of itself mean that error necessarily arises." *Ibid*, 99-100.

³⁷ "But this safeguard, and all the negative safeguards so far mentioned, can be recognised as necessary and therefore valid only if we set against them the positive pre-condition which must be fulfilled in this matter"; "The fulfilling of the first four of these conditions depends upon the fulfilling of the fifth". *Ibid*, 105 and 107 respectively.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 107.

³⁹ "The great advantage of this doctrine [the divine *concursum*] is that it did venture, and even carried to its logical conclusion, the proposition which alone corresponds to the true

and Reformed theologians were wrong in their exposition of the divine *concursus*?⁴⁰ Barth's reply is as follows:

If only the Christian sense of it, as it appears in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, had been more clearly perceived, or better, more radically developed! But this was not the case either with Zwingli or Calvin, or the later Reformed dogmaticians. They ventured the proposition and carried it to its logical conclusion, and for this we must applaud them when we consider the way in which it has been weakened and watered down in the later history of the doctrine right up to the present time. But they venture it - and this we can and must describe as their tragic fault - only on the same presupposition of purely formal concepts of God and His will and work as that of their opponents. Naturally, they maintained and protested that the will and work of God is holy and just and good. But they could never explain or say how it is that those qualities can be ascribed to it, and how far men can reasonably and justifiably be demanded to believe in the God who works all in all, or to what extent submission to the will and work of God is the obedience of faith necessarily required of the Christian.⁴¹

relation between God and the creature: that it is absolutely the will of God alone which is executed in all creaturely activity and creaturely occurrence. It did genuinely think of the *concursus divinus* as irreversible. It did not take into account any possible concurring of the creature in the will and work of God. It conceived of this will and work as unconditioned and unlimited and irresistible. It accepted and emphasises the demand implicit in this confession. We can see this in Calvin (*Instit.* I, 16-18) no less logically if not so provocatively as in Zwingli's *De providentia*, and in the Reformed orthodox theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries no less logically than in Calvin. Indeed, the concepts and terminology taken over from Scholasticism were applied by them in such a way as to push this aspect of the matter to its logical conclusion. We must be quite clear in our minds that it is this conception which stands at the back of Questions 26-28 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and that we cannot expound the *Catechism* literally if this conception is denied." *Ibid*, 115.

⁴⁰ He said as much when he comments "that from the historical standpoint we come to what might be called the tragedy of the Reformed doctrine of providence and more particularly of the divine *concursus*?" *Ibid*, 115.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 115. Note also the following comment of Barth: "We may bewail the many-sided declension from the older reformed conception, but we cannot overlook the fact that, in so far as it means a demand for faith which, constituted as it then was, it could not possibly meet, it was itself the cause of this declension. The concept was a correct one, but from the very outset it lacked the foundation which would have made it credible, distinguishing it from a questionable *philosophoumenon*. It is no less true, of course, that the synergistic

Thus, Barth leads us back to his original criticism of Calvin and the other Reformers: that their doctrine of providence is not "Christian" enough, or not "Christian" at all. And it is so because they relied too much upon philosophical categories to expound their doctrine of providence and, especially, the concept of the divine *concursum*.

The result, according to Barth, of this borrowing from and over-dependence upon philosophy is that the Christian concept of divine providence is perceived to be no different from that of Stoicism, Islam, for that matter, even blind fate!⁴² Indeed, Barth lays the blame more upon Calvin and the Calvinists than anyone else for such a departure from the biblical notion of divine providence.⁴³ In his view, it was this failure that led to a wholesale distortion of this doctrine within Reformed theology in 17th and 18th centuries, culminating in Schleiermacher's conception of divine providence which "exposed it to all the suspicions which have surrounded it from the very outset, even to that of Spinozism, or more generally of a pantheistic-naturalistic monism."⁴⁴

From the foregoing discussion, it would be fair to summarize Barth's critique of Calvin's doctrine of providence as follow. For Barth, Calvin's doctrine of providence is, at best, not sufficiently Christian because Calvin did not assert what he terms the "christological" basis of providence. By

constructions opposed to it by the Romanists, Lutherans, Arminians, and later the Moderns, could not be distinguished from a mere *philosophoumenon*, but all of them lay sick in the same ward, playing with the same empty concepts without any reference to the biblical centre". *Ibid*, 116. Thus, in one sweep, Barth puts all these different schools on the same plane: they all failed to present the biblical doctrine of providence because they did not base it upon a proper Christology, but upon philosophy.

⁴² *Ibid*, 113-114.

⁴³ Having placed the Romanists, Lutherans, Arminians and the Moderns on the same plane - that they were all over-dependent upon philosophy for their notion of divine providence - he has this to say of the Reformed fathers: "...the Reformed fathers were in no better case than the others. On the contrary, their opponents had the advantage that in their statements they did seem to take more account of the demands of ordinary reason and practical piety than did the sinister heralds of an even more sinister piety. For this was what the Reformed divines appeared to be. Indeed, this is what they were - shockingly enough - and all because of their inability to apply fruitfully to this field the proper centre of all Reformed knowledge, the doctrine of grace and justification." *Ibid*, 116.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 116-117.

"christological", Barth means nothing less than that the God presented as the God of providence must be none other than God the Father as revealed by, through and in Jesus Christ. This, according to Barth, must, of necessity, embrace the need for faith or belief in Jesus Christ if providence is to be deemed "Christian". In fact, it must view providence as part and parcel of the on-going activity of God the Father through the exalted Jesus Christ. According to Barth, what may have contributed to this failure of Calvin in asserting the "christological" basis is the latter's desire to attach some value or importance to natural theology or even naturalistic philosophy itself. Indeed, as Barth has shown in Section 49, he believes that Calvin, no less than the other Reformers, while rightly adopting the concept of divine *concursus* and the terminology of *causa* from philosophy, unwittingly, became over-dependent upon them (i.e., divine *concursus* and *causa*) for their exposition of divine providence.

What must not be overlooked, however, is that Barth's critique actually arises from what he believes to be the correct way to read Calvin on providence. Barth contends that if Calvin had a Christian concept of providence at all, it would have been, indeed, it must be worked out in the *locus classicus* of Calvin's exposition of providence in the 1559 Institutes. But precisely because he finds no trace of such a "christological" basis for Calvin's doctrine of providence there, he concluded that Calvin does not posit a "christological" basis at all. He further contends that if only Calvin and the other reformers had given the sort of attention they should have to certain Scriptural texts, for instance, John 5:17, Colossians 1:17, and Hebrews 1:3, they would not have failed in this respect. The unfortunate fact is that they did not. As such, their view of divine providence falls short of the proper Christian view.

IV. DID BARTH MISREAD CALVIN?

Did Barth read Calvin correctly? Or, did he genuinely misread him? In *The Faith of the Church*, while discussing Questions 13-14 of Calvin's

Catechism,⁴⁵ Barth says this of Calvin:

Calvin clearly indicates the origin of our knowledge of God's love. Note well: it is not a question of a general and abstract and philosophical knowledge, not a question of a treatise on the love of God in nature or on love in general; all this, all these abstract ideas are a piece of paper, a great noise, only ideas.⁴⁶

What then, according to Barth, was Calvin's position with regards to the revelation of God's love if it is not mere philosophical knowledge?

The love of God is not an abstract quality of God's; it is an act: God takes to heart our misery. In Jesus Christ, He declares His mercy unto us and puts this mercy to work, and there is no mercy towards us outside Jesus Christ.⁴⁷

Indeed, Barth goes on to add the following comment which, in the light of his criticisms above, comes as a real surprise:

For Calvin, on the contrary, Jesus Christ holds a central position... He is the mercy of God, he is the love of God, he is the open heart of God. By knowing Jesus Christ, we then have this "trust" we talked about above.⁴⁸

It would seem from the above comments that Barth believes that Calvin thinks christologically. And yet our study thus far suggests otherwise. Was

⁴⁵ "Question 13: Where will this [i.e., the love of God] be apparent to us? - In His Word, where He reveals His mercy to us in Christ and testifies of His love towards us. Question 14: Then the foundation and beginning of faith in God is to know Him in Christ? (John 17:3) - Quite so." Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 31.

⁴⁶ Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 31.

⁴⁷ Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 31.

⁴⁸ Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 32.

Barth contradicting himself, or did he genuinely misread Calvin?

That Barth was not contradicting himself may be proved from two considerations. First of all, Barth was discussing two different doctrines in Calvin on each occasion. As such, he may have considered Calvin as sufficiently christological in the doctrine of the revelation of God's love, while in the doctrine of providence, Calvin was not christological enough. Secondly, it could also mean that Barth believes Calvin is, generally, christological. But in this one particular, the doctrine of providence, he is not sufficiently christological. If those were Barth's positions, then, it can be said that Barth was not contradicting himself. He was merely drawing attention to a particular doctrine where, "christologically-speaking", Calvin was defective.

The evidence, moreover, seems to point in that direction. For example, when discussing the first article of the Apostles' Creed⁴⁹ in *The Faith of the Church*, he commends Calvin thus, over and against nominalism:

On the contrary, the Bible, Calvin and the confessions of the Reformation speak of God in the manner of realism. If we call God Father, it is because he is Father in reality. And the relation between God's Fatherhood and fatherhood among men reverses itself: we do not call God Father because we know what that is; on the contrary, because we know God's Fatherhood we afterwards understand what human fatherhood truly is.⁵⁰

Yet, in his opinion, Calvin had not gone far enough, at least, not as far as *The Heidelberg Catechism*. In Barth's words:

The Heidelberg Catechism puts it even more clearly (Question 26): "What believest thou when thou sayest, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"? - That the eternal Father of

⁴⁹ Namely, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

⁵⁰ Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 37.

our Lord Jesus Christ, who... made heaven and earth... is for the sake of his Son, my God and my Father."⁵¹

Thus, Barth continues to maintain, as he did in his *Church Dogmatics III/3*, and that very consistently, that Calvin was not sufficiently christological in his doctrine of creation and providence. In comparison, *The Heidelberg Catechism* is much more precise "christologically" and, therefore, preferable. This is made absolutely clear when commenting on Calvin's exposition of the Apostles' Creed, Barth notes the following:

Calvin continually and closely notes the *relation between the second and the third article*. He was not as clear on the relation between the first and the second. Surely, the first article presupposes and already calls forth the second. But the second does not explicitly recall the first.⁵²

It must be noted that while Barth believes Calvin failed to expound his "theology proper" christologically, he thought otherwise of his pneumatology. Calvin was "spot-on" in his pneumatology. But, as we have seen throughout this chapter, Barth maintains consistently that Calvin failed precisely, in this same regard, in his exposition of providence. Thus, Barth cannot be deemed in any way as contradicting himself.

So we are left with the real possibility that *Barth genuinely misread Calvin*. It would seem that Barth could have been misled into thinking that since did not deal with providence under the knowledge of God the Redeemer, Calvin's treatment of providence cannot, therefore, be "christological". Barth is not the only culprit in this. As this study has already shown, almost every scholar who has speculated as to why Calvin kept providence under the knowledge of God the Creator and predestination under the knowledge of God the Redeemer in the definitive edition of his

⁵¹ Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 37-38.

⁵² Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 46. Italics, original.

Institutes of 1559 has made the same presupposition.⁵³ Paul Jacobs is probably most representative of those who make this presupposition. Commenting on the correlation between Calvin's doctrine of providence and the doctrine of predestination, he writes:

That the doctrine of predestination does not appear (which is in conformity with the place of election in the economy of salvation) before the doctrine of creation, this follows from the fact that it cannot be properly considered except from a Christocentric point of view.⁵⁴

No one doubts that Calvin was christocentric in his understanding of predestination.⁵⁵ But to suggest that because Calvin has located divine providence within his treatment of the knowledge of God the Creator, he did not give it a christological emphasis would be to deny all the evidence provided to the contrary in the preceding chapters of this study. It may actually fly in the face of Calvin's own insistence that no true knowledge of God - whether as Creator or as Redeemer - is possible without the revelation of God in and through Jesus Christ, a fact that Barth himself already admits to as shown above.

It would seem, therefore, that if only Barth has taken into serious consideration Calvin's intention to treat divine providence as integral to his discussion of the knowledge of God the Creator and, therefore, the necessity to study the *locus classicus* within its context as outlined in this study, he would not have misread Calvin on providence. He would have seen that the Scripture texts he deems are necessary to a proper christology were not neglected by Calvin after all. On the contrary, Calvin employed them constantly within his discussion of the Trinity, not least when proving the

⁵³ See Chapter 1, pages 10-14 of this study for such examples.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Wendel, *ibid*, 268, as Note 115.

⁵⁵ Richard A. Muller has established, rather conclusively, that in Calvin, Christology and predestination can no longer be viewed in isolation. See his *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1986).

deity of Christ.⁵⁶ Barth also would have noticed that Calvin's discussion of divine providence in the 1559 *Institutes* not only has a solid christological basis; it is treated within a Trinitarian context. Thus, any suggestion that Calvin was more christocentric in his doctrine of predestination than in his doctrine of providence must be approached with caution.

That Barth did misread Calvin despite all evidences to the contrary may perhaps be traced to other two factors. It may be due, in the first instance, to the fact that Calvin's theological method is radically different from Barth's. Calvin's theological method does not depend upon a single theological axiom or an indispensable theological first principle to the same extent as that of Barth.⁵⁷ This is not to say that there is no particular emphasis in Calvin's theology. As Muller has perceptively suggested, it would seem that it is the trinitarian ground of doctrine which serves to unite the various motifs in Calvin's doctrinal system. Yet, as he equally acknowledges, all these motifs "impinge upon a common interest and appear as related epicenters in the trinitarian structure of the *Institutes*".⁵⁸ This is evident in Book 1 of the 1559 *Institutes* where, as we have seen, Calvin endeavours to hold together all the different doctrines simply because there is such an interpenetration between them, they are all integral to each other. In that sense, Calvin does not strictly adhere to a single doctrine which functions as an axiom in his system. The same, however, cannot be said of

⁵⁶ John 5:17 is employed by Calvin in *Inst.* 1.13.7 (130); 1.13.12 (136); 1.16.4 (203); 2.14.2 (483). Similarly, Col 1:15-18 is employed in *Inst.* 1.14.5 (166), 1.14.10 (170); 2.14.2 (483), 2.14.5 (489); and, Heb 1:3 in *Inst.* 1.13.2 (122-123); 1.13.7 (129); 1.13.12 (136); 1.13.23 (150); 1.16.4 (203); 2.2.20 (279); 2.9.1 (424); 2.16.14 (523); 3.2.1 (544); 3.6.3 (686); 4.17.26 (1394).

⁵⁷ For instance, Helm has demonstrated in "Calvin (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence" that, for Calvin, providence or predestination does not function as a single theological axiom from which all other doctrines are derivable *more geometrico*. He further suggests (*ibid*, 405): "If anyone among the reformers can be said to develop a doctrine of providence/predestination in axiomatic fashion, Zwingli is a more likely candidate for this dubious honour than is John Calvin."

⁵⁸ Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 17-22. Muller suggests that Calvin's fundamental theological principles are the doctrines of the trinity, of Christ as *deus manifestatus in carne*, and of the causality of salvation focused on Christ. But he also recognises, for instance, that built into Calvin's system is an interrelation and interpenetration of predestination and Christology. See, *ibid*, 18.

Barth. As Thompson has so accurately pointed out, Barth's theology is "all Christology".⁵⁹ While this does not mean Barth's theology has no distinct Christology or a Christological focus, it nevertheless is still true to say that for Barth, by his own admission, dogmatics must be all or entirely Christological,⁶⁰ so much so he has been charged with a pronounced tendency toward Christomonism.⁶¹ The difference, then, between Calvin's

⁵⁹ John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 1. Similarly, Klaas Runia has observed: "Especially since his study of 1931 on *Anselm: Fides Quarens Intellectum*, Barth was bent upon a thorough-going Christological concentration of the whole range of systematic theology." See Klaas Runia, *The Present-Day Christological Debate* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 16. Elsewhere, Runia has also affirmed: "For Barth, Jesus Christ is the point of departure for every theological proposition." See Klaas Runia, "Karl Barth's Christology" in *Christ the Lord*, Ed. Harold H Rowdon (Leicester: IVP, 1982), 299. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, Trans. Garrett E Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 127-138.

⁶⁰ Barth, *CD* I/2, 123: "A church dogmatics must, of course, be christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts... If dogmatics cannot regard itself and cause itself to be regarded as fundamentally Christology, it has assuredly succumbed to some alien sway and is already on the verge of losing its character as church dogmatics... As a whole, i.e., in the basic statements of a church dogmatics, Christology must either be dominant and perceptible, or else it is not Christology. That is precisely why there has to be a special Christology, an express doctrine of the person of Christ." Cf. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, Trans. G T Thomson (London: SCM, 1966), 66: "That is... why Christology, is the touchstone of all knowledge of God in the Christian sense, the touchstone of all theology and philosophy, and the relation between knowledge of God and knowledge of men, the relation between revelation and reason, the relation between Gospel and Law, the relation between God's truth and man's truth, the relation between outer and inner, the relation between theology and politics." For a recent competent study of the centrality of Christology in Barth's theology, see George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), especially the penultimate chapter, "Conclusion: Christ the Center", 225-233. Having examined the motifs which shaped Barth's mature theology, Hunsinger concludes, *ibid*, 229: "Jesus Christ is the center of the motifs. They are all descriptive of him. Without him in mind they are meant to be nothing. They are of no interest in and of themselves, but only as they point to him."

⁶¹ See Muller, "The Place and Importance of Karl Barth in the Twentieth Century: A Review Essay", 150-151: "The reason that Barth's theological method... is Christomonistic is that it turns radically away from the concrete historical existence of Jesus Christ and finds its basis on an extrapolation, a dogmatic abstraction, of a series of doctrinal concepts – and the concepts themselves are abstractions already, abstractions based on the materials of the gospel narrative... Such approaches, precisely because they move away from the concrete, historical Jesus, precisely because they speak of history itself in a highly abstract manner as an event in the eternal Godhead rather than as the course of human experience, precisely because they deliver to us a Christ-principle to be used for the inclusive understanding of all doctrine, must be identified as a Christomonism and – methodologically and theologically – as highly problematic."

theological method and that of Barth may be described as follows: while there is a very discernible Christological emphasis in Calvin's theology, it is not all "Christology". Unlike Barth, Calvin does not hold that Jesus Christ is the entirety of God's revelation or, for that matter, Scripture is wholly about Christ and Christ alone.

This brings to the fore a second related factor which would have contributed to Barth's misreading of Calvin, namely, that Calvin's Christology is radically different from that of Barth. As the previous chapter has so clearly demonstrated, Calvin has what may be termed a Christology of the Old Testament which incorporates the reality of the activity of the pre-incarnate Christ. The most obvious example is the way in which Calvin treated the appearances of the Angel of Yahweh as instances of the pre-incarnate Christ's direct and personal involvement in divine providence. To his mind, there is no difficulty in accepting these as Christophanies. As such, he accepted the biblical witness (based especially upon Paul's identification of the Rock in 1 Cor 10:4 with Christ) and the Church's tradition concerning the pre-incarnate work of the eternal Word. Barth, however, entertains no such concept. His Christology is based solidly upon the incarnation of Christ. There is no place for the work of the pre-incarnate Christ. Jüngel admits as much when he says that Barth has declared that the idea of a pre-incarnate Logos, an eternal "fleshless Word of God" is "an impermissible theological abstraction".⁶² Thus, in his most extended treatment of the Angel of Yahweh in his *Church Dogmatics* III/3, Barth, unlike Calvin, surmised that the early Church succumbed to the temptation of identifying this angel with the pre-existent Logos.⁶³ For his own part, he sees no necessity for such an identification.⁶⁴ Christ is far more than can be embraced merely by the

⁶² Jüngel, *ibid*, 130.

⁶³ Barth, *CD* III/3, 486.

⁶⁴ Barth is not alone in this respect. Modern rejections of the pre-existent Logos view include Walter Eichrodt and James D G Dunn. Eichrodt writes in his *Theology of the Old Testament, Volume Two*, Trans. J A Baker (London: SCM, 1967), 28: "In the Christian Church, from the time of the Early Fathers down to the nineteenth century, there was always a temptation to expand this distinctive expression of the divine saving activity along speculative lines, and, after the manner of Philo, to see in the angel of

concept of the Angel of Yahweh. He is the Son of God and Son of Man with whom as such no heavenly being, which is neither God nor man, is identical, who cannot be prefigured by any such being or set alongside it as a fulfilment. We are closer, he says, "to the meaning and text of these Old Testament passages if we accept purely as an angel this one angel of God which is given such prominence, learning from it the supreme relevance of the existence and ministry of angels in their connexion with the incomparable and irreplaceable Word and work of God".⁶⁵

God the pre-existent Logos. Nevertheless this interpretation has rightly been abandoned on all sides, since the God who reveals himself in the *mal'ak* is in no sense present in a human body or as a permanent personal being, but appears only during a limited period of history, namely the era of early Israel, and in a variety of forms, now in a flame, now in human lineaments, now in a dream, now in auditory experiences." Similarly, Dunn writes in his *Christology in the Making* (London, SCM Press Ltd, 1980), 157-159: "Finally we should mention the suggestion that 'the angel of the Lord' in the OT would have been read by some NT writers as a reference to Jesus himself; in other words, that Justin Martyr's identification of the angel of the Lord as the pre-existent Christ would have been familiar among first-century Christians, part of a wider belief in the pre-existent Jesus as actually present at certain points in OT history. The suggestion however is at best implausible, not least in view of their findings already in this paragraph. For example, the assumption 'that Paul saw in the pillar of cloud the pre-existent Christ' (with reference to Ex. 14.19) can hardly be based on 1 Cor 10.2, where 'the cloud' together with 'the sea' make up the watery element of the Israelites' baptism, and where it is Moses who is most obviously understood as the type or equivalent of Christ ('baptized into Moses'...). There is no thought whatsoever of Christ being in the cloud (or being the cloud) – such an equation complicates and confuses Paul's thought without justification... There is no evidence that any NT writer thought of Jesus as actually present in Israel's past, either as the angel of the Lord, or as 'the Lord' himself. So far as we can tell then no NT writer thought of Christ as an angel, whether as a pre-existent divine being who had appeared in Israel's history as the angel of the Lord, or as an angel or spirit become man, or as a man who by exaltation after death had become an angel. 'The angel of the Lord' in the early Jewish texts is most obviously a way of speaking about Yahweh himself, and when 'the angel of the Lord' reappears in the writings of Luke and Matthew there is no real possibility of confusing him with Jesus. The idea of Jesus as an incarnation of an angel never seems to have entered the head of any NT author... In short, the thesis that an angel christology was entertained in some parts of earliest Christianity has little or nothing to sustain it, and the suggestion that any NT author maintained an angel christology runs clearly counter to the evidence."

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 487. Weber confirms this reading: "However, angelic apparitions, as in Gen., ch. 18, for example, ought not to have been connected with the Logos, with the second Person of the Trinity; the angel is 'God's angel for Israel'..., 'a functionary of Yahweh's special relationship of grace'... For Christ is 'more than a pure witness of God. He is, like the Old Testament covenant God (and as the reality of Him who is hidden in the Old Testament, though already proclaimed in the form of mere promise), the Godhead itself, speaking and acting upon earth.' No angel is 'identical with him'; neither is he 'prefigured' by any." See Otto Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, trans. Arthur C Cochrane (London: Lutherworth Press, 1953), 201-202.

This view of Barth of the Christology of the Old Testament not only raises a whole host of questions about his understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, the adequacy of Old Testament theology to its own historical context, and the usefulness of the Old Testament to Christian theology;⁶⁶ it highlights why Barth probably ignored the significance of Calvin's treatment of the Angel of Yahweh in *Inst.* 1.13-14. Indeed, Barth seems to discount its significance for Calvin simply because their respective views on the Angel of Yahweh are different.⁶⁷ And yet, as the previous chapter of this study has shown, Calvin's treatment of the Angel of Yahweh is closely related not only to his treatment of divine providence; it is also set within a Trinitarian and soteriological context. Equally significant is that these appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ in the Old Testament are not merely for the purpose of revealing God's providence: it is, for Calvin, a concrete expression of the mediatorial work of Christ prior to his incarnation. Given that radical difference in their understanding of the Angel of Yahweh, one would have to say, at the least, that Barth's doctrine of divine providence as seen from the Old Testament perspective would be different from Calvin's.

The above observations would suggest that any comparative study of the doctrine of divine providence between Barth and Calvin must take into serious consideration their radical difference in terms of theological method and Christology. Indeed, it is quite obvious that Barth's criticism of Calvin's lack of a christologically-based exposition of providence could be attributed to Barth's tendency to press Calvin into his own mould both in terms of his theological method and his Christology. Barth sees Calvin's theology through his own eyes and not through Calvin's eyes. As such he expects Calvin to do theology in the same way he does, that is, to deal with every doctrine in the same Barthian christological mould. But because Calvin does not, he is not

⁶⁶ Muller, "The Place and Importance of Karl Barth in the Twentieth Century: A Review Essay", 148.

⁶⁷ Barth does not, in discussing the Angel of Yahweh, mention Paul's identification of the Rock in 1 Cor 10:4 with Christ as Calvin does. His emphasis on Jacob's ladder, too, is very different from that of Calvin (see Barth, *CD III/3*, 436, 479, 501).

sufficiently christological therefore for Barth. In a word, Barth's misreading of Calvin on divine providence can be traced to the former's commitment to what he himself believes to be the only proper way of doing theology and to expect that others should do it in his way. But is the "Barthian" way the only way of doing theology? For that matter, is the "Barthian" way of doing Christology the only way of doing Christology? If only Barth has permitted Calvin to speak for himself and look at the latter's treatment of divine providence within the context in which it was intended, both structurally and theologically, he probably would not have misread Calvin as he did.

APPENDIX A

[Adapted from *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*. Edited by G Baum, E Cunitz, E Ruess, et. al., (Brunsvigae: Apud C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1863. See CO I, li.].

SYNOPSIS OF THE EDITIONS OF CALVIN'S *INSTITUTES*

(*Note*: The pages and sections indicated in brackets are those which were moved in the different editions in comparison with the 1559 edition.)

1536	1539	1543-45	1550-54	1559
				Book 1
	Chapter 1	Chapter 1	Chapter 1	Knowledge of God
	Knowledge of God	Knowledge of God	Knowledge of God	The Creator
p 42	pp 1, 2	pp 1, 2	Sect 1-3	Chapter 1
	pp 2, 3, 5	pp 2, 3, 5	Sect 4-5, 9, 10	Chapter 2
	pp 4, 5	pp 3, 4	Sect 6-8	Chapter 3
	pp 6-9	pp 5-8	Sect 11-18	Chapter 4
	pp 9-11	pp 8-9	Sect 19, 20	Chapter 5
	pp 11, 12	pp 9, 10	Sect 21-24	Chapter 6
	pp 12-13	pp 10-12	Sect 25-33	Chapter 7
	pp 13-15	pp 12, 13	Sect 34-36	Chapter 8
	pp 15-16	pp 13, 14	Sect 37, 38	Chapter 9
				Chapter 10

255	1536	1539	1543-45	1550-54	1559
	(pp 53-57) (p 52)	(pp 66-71) (pp 64-66)	(pp 63-69) (pp 62-63)	(Chap 3, Sect 24-29) (Chap 3, Sect 20-23)	Chapter 11 Chapter 12
	(pp 110-116) (p 117) (p 43)	(pp 113-122) (pp 122) (pp 18, 19) (pp 22-23) (pp 123-124) (pp 264, 265) (pp 265-271)	(pp 121-129) (pp 129-138) (pp 16, 17) (pp 20, 21) (p 139) (pp 367-369) (pp 369-374)	(Chap 6, Sect 6-25) (Chap 6, Sect 28-48) (Chap 2, Sect 6, 7) (Chap 2, Sect 18, 19) (Chap 6, Sect 49-51) (Chap 14, Sect 38-41) (Chap 14, Sect 42-45)	Chapter 13 Chapter 14 Chap 15, Sect 1-5 Chap 15, Sect 6-8 Chap 16, Sect 1-3 Chap 16, Sect 4-9 Chapter 17 Chapter 18
	(p 118)				

APPENDIX B

[Adapted from Ford Lewis Battles, "Calculus Fidei" in W H Neuser, Ed., *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor* (Kampen: Uitgeursmaatschappij J H Kok B.V., 1978), p. 87.]

	1536	1539	1543-1550	1559
1. Law				
a. Knowledge of God	1.	Knowledge of God	1. Knowledge of God	Book 1 (God the Creator)
b. Knowledge of man	2.	Knowledge of man	2. Knowledge of man	Chs. 1-10
c. Law & Decalogue	3.	Law	3. Law	11-12 (Idolatry)
d. Justification			4. On Vows	13-14 (Trinity/Creation)
2. Faith: Apostles' Creed	4.	Faith: Apostles' Creed	5. Faith: Apostles' Creed	15 (Creation of Man)
a. Part I		a. Part I	6. Creed 1	16-17 (Providence)
b. Part II		b. Part II	7. Creed 2	18
c. Part III		c. Part III	8. Creed 3	Book 2 (God the Redeemer)
d. Part IV		d. Part IV	8. Creed 4	Chs. 1-5
				6
				7-8
				9
				10
				11
				12-16
				17
				Book 3 (Receiving Grace..)
				Chs. 1
				2
				3-5
				6-10
				11-18
				19
				20
				21-24
				25

APPENDIX C

Chapters of Book 1	New Material Incorporated Into Book 1 of the 1559 <i>Institutes</i>
Ch. 1	1.1.1 (31)
Ch. 2	1.2.1 (34), 1.2.2 (35, 37)
Ch. 3	1.3.1 (37), 1.3.3 (39-40)
Ch. 4	1.4.1 (40-41), 1.4.2 (41-42), 1.4.4 (44)
Ch. 5	1.5.1 (45), 1.5.3-5 (46-50), 1.5.6 (50-51), 1.5.8 (52), 1.5.10 (54-55), 1.5.12-13 (56-58)
Ch. 6	1.6.1 (60, 61), 1.6.2 (62-63), 1.6.3 (64), 1.6.4 (64)
Ch. 7	1.7.1 (65), 1.7.4 (68-70), 1.7.5 (70, 71)
Ch. 8	1.8.2 (72-73), 1.8.4 (74), 1.8.6 (75-76), 1.8.10 (79), 1.8.11 (79-80)
Ch. 9	1.9.1 (82), 1.9.2 (83)
Ch. 10	1.10.1 (85-86), 1.10.3 (87-88)
Ch. 11	1.11.1 (88-89), 1.11.2 (89), 1.11.3 (90, 91), 1.11.4 (92-93), 1.11.8 (96-97)
Ch. 12	1.12.1 (105-106), 1.12.3 (108)
Ch. 13	1.13.1 (108-109), 1.13.2 (109-111), 1.13.5 (114, 115, 116), 1.13.6 (116), 1.13.7 (117-118), 1.13.8 (118, 119), 1.13.9 (119, 120, 121), 1.13.10 (121-123), 1.13.11 (123), 1.13.14 (127, 128), 1.13.15 (129), 1.13.16 (129), 1.13.17 (131), 1.13.19 (133), 1.13.20 (133-135), 1.13.21 (136, 137), 1.13.22-23 (137-142), 1.13.24 (142-145), 1.13.25-29 (145-151).
Ch. 14	1.14.1-2 (152-154), 1.14.3 (154-156), 1.14.7 (160), 1.14.8 (160-161), 1.14.9 (161-162), 1.14.12 (164), 1.14.15 (167), 1.14.18 (168-169)
Ch. 15	1.15.1 (173), 1.15.2-3 (174-179), 1.15.4 (179, 180), 1.15.5 (181-182), 1.15.6 (182-183), 1.15.8 (185-187)
Ch. 16	1.16.1 (187-188), 1.16.2 (188-189, 190), 1.16.3 (190-191), 1.16.4 (192, 193, 194), 1.16.5 (195, 196), 1.16.6 (196, 197), 1.16.7 (197, 198), 1.16.8 (199-200), 1.16.9 (200-201)
Ch. 17	1.17.1-2 (202-205), 1.17.3 (205-206), 1.17.4 (207), 1.17.6 (210), 1.17.8 (212), 1.17.9 (214), 1.17.11 (215-216), 1.17.12 (217)
Ch. 18	1.18.1 (219-221), 1.18.2-4 (221-227)

Note: The numbers provided in brackets refer to the pages found in *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta, Volume 3*, edited by P Barth and W Niesel (Monachii in Aedibus: Chr. Kaiser, 1926-1936).

APPENDIX D

Chapters of Book 1	Number of Sections	New material incorporated into Book 1 of the 1559 <i>Institutes</i>		
		Whole section	More than half a section	Less than half a section
Ch. 1	3		1.1.1	
Ch. 2	2		1.2.1	1.2.2
Ch. 3	3		1.3.3	1.3.1
Ch. 4	4	1.4.2	1.4.1	1.4.4
Ch. 5	14	1.5.3-5, 1.5.12-13	1.5.8	1.5.1, 1.5.6, 1.5.10
Ch. 6	4		1.6.1, 1.6.2	1.6.3, 1.6.4
Ch. 7	5		1.7.4, 1.7.5	1.7.1
Ch. 8	13	1.8.2, 1.8.4, 1.8.6, 1.8.11		1.8.10
Ch. 9	3			1.9.1, 1.9.2
Ch. 10	3	1.10.3	1.10.1	
Ch. 11	15	1.11.1	1.11.4	1.11.2, 1.11.3, 1.11.8
Ch. 12	3		1.12.1	1.12.3
Ch. 13	29	1.13.6, 1.13.10, 1.13.22-23, 1.13.25-29	1.13.1, 1.13.2, 1.13.7, 1.13.20, 1.13.24	1.13.5, 1.13.8, 1.13.9, 1.13.11, 1.13.14, 1.13.15, 1.13.16, 1.13.17, 1.13.19, 1.13.21
Ch. 14	22	1.14.1-2		1.14.3, 1.14.7, 1.14.8, 1.14.9, 1.14.12, 1.14.15, 1.14.18
Ch. 15	8	1.15.2-3, 1.15.5, 1.15.8	1.15.1, 1.15.4, 1.15.6	
Ch. 16	9		1.16.5, 1.16.7, 1.16.9	1.16.1, 1.16.2, 1.16.3, 1.16.4, 1.16.6, 1.16.8
Ch. 17	14	1.17.1-2		1.17.3, 1.17.4, 1.17.6, 1.17.8, 1.17.9, 1.17.11, 1.17.12
Ch. 18	4	1.18.2-4	1.18.1	
Total	158	32	24	46

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